

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Village of Gurnee Honors 2022 Teachers of the Year Recipients

GURNEE, IL – The Village of Gurnee is excited to announce the 2022 Gurnee Teacher of the Year Awards. The recipients are Ms. Ashley Turkington (Warren Township High School District 121), Mr. Joe Rejczyk (Woodland District 50), and Mrs. Lisa McLeRoy (Gurnee District 56).

These annual awards were created through the collaboration of the Village, the school districts, and local business owner Donald Henderson as well as under the leadership of Mayor Tom Hood. The awards recognize the distinguished accomplishments of a peer-nominated recipient from each district in service to their students, school, and school district.

Ms. Ashley Turkington has served in education for 14 years teaching at Warren Township High School specifically teaching students with emotional disabilities and other behavioral concerns that require more specialized support than what is offered in other special education classes.

“One of the greatest privileges in my life is to work with students who need more behavioral and emotional support, and I can be a cheerleader and supporter, as well as their teacher,” Turkington said. “I believe that life can deal some real tough cards to certain students; if I can be even a glimmer of hope in their otherwise chaotic worlds, then I’m doing my job correctly. For that, I am truly fortunate. I genuinely believe that these students teach me just as much as I teach them.” Turkington says her role at Warren is to provide a safe environment in which students are provided the following: a smaller, structured setting, direct instruction of content, individualized learning opportunities, and assisting and supporting students in the reduction in the number of credits that they need to recover. It is a joy to be able to provide a positive learning environment for personal success and student growth – both academic and social, as well as providing students with executive functioning skills including emotional control, self-monitoring, and organization in everyday emotional and academic tasks.

“Ashley always puts her students first and provides all the necessary support for their success,” said Dr. John Ahlgrim, Warren Township High School District 121 Superintendent. “She is creative and enthusiastic in her lessons and provides exceptional inspiration for her students and our entire WTHS community. We are proud to help recognize her as our Gurnee Teacher of the Year. Teachers at WTHS are among some of the greatest educators because of their heart, their inspiration, their dedication, and their drive to genuinely want to better every single student’s life that they encounter. I have been blessed to work with these phenomenal colleagues and friends, and find myself constantly striving to be a better version of myself under their influence and because of their influence.”

She holds a bachelor’s degree from Northern Illinois University in Special Education and a master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Concordia University.

Mr. Joe Rejczyk started at Woodland Intermediate in 1997 as a Physical Education teacher. After 24 years as a PE teacher, he noticed a need for special education students to have a more complete and fulfilling PE experience. He began the “Buddy” Program to go along with the adaptive PE program. This was an opportunity for regular education students to voluntarily spend their lunch/recess in the gym assisting special education students. This gave the special needs students a much more fulfilling and less restrictive time in the gym. During those years, he became more and more interested in special education. His next steps included voluntarily substituting for any special education teachers and then applying to be a paraprofessional during summer school ESY (extended school year) at Woodland. He decided to start taking the necessary steps and classes to become a special education teacher himself, and finished in 2020 and began the 2020-2021 school year in his current position in a structured classroom.

Mr. Rejczyk credits his amazing paraprofessionals he works with for a great deal of his success. He loves working with his students and finds their needs challenging, yet reciprocally rewarding! He is excellent at communicating with parents on a daily basis and finds a great deal of pride in sharing each student’s daily successes with his “Mom & Dad”.

Mrs. Lisa McLeRoy joined Gurnee School District 56 and Spaulding School as an elementary classroom teacher in 1986 and has been a member of the D56 family ever since. She and her husband, Jeff, settled and raised their two boys Elliot and Ethan in the Gurnee School District as well. Over the years, she has taught in the regular classroom and is finishing her career as a reading specialist. As many teachers do, Mrs. McLeRoy has worked behind the scenes on committees, helping with special projects to keep Spaulding and the District moving forward. She is a teacher and leader and tirelessly seeks ways to help the youngest learners blossom into readers. She has unofficially mentored younger teachers, boosting their confidence and supporting them in their development of classroom management and teaching strategies. Mrs. McLeRoy led the development of Reading Rounds, which is a Spaulding professional development program. Lisa worked with teachers and demonstrated reading comprehension strategies to move students towards higher thinking levels. This program helps all of the staff to remain current on the newest research related to teaching young children to read. Through her direct instruction with students and the support of her colleagues, she has impacted the lives of thousands of Spaulding readers.

Dr. Colleen Pacatte Gurnee Grade School District 56 Superintendent said, “Mrs. McLeRoy's teaching skills are second to none, and she is also one of the most creative teachers in D56. She is always willing to help out where there is a need, making her an excellent team member. Lisa McLeRoy is a model of excellence for everyone, staff and students.”

Regarding the awards, Mayor Tom Hood said, “This is an opportunity we have to recognize the teachers in our community. It is an often thankless job, so I want to take this opportunity to thank you all that you do.”

Mayor Tom Hood, Don Henderson of the Henderson Foundation, and each school district’s corresponding superintendent presented awards to the winners on Monday, May 2. In addition to the plaque recognizing their achievement, teachers received a monetary contribution from the Henderson Foundation.

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