

PRESS RELEASE

VILLAGE OF GURNEE - 325 N. O'PLAINE ROAD - GURNEE, IL 60031 - (847) 623-7650 - FAX: (847) 623-9475

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Jack Linehan, Assistant Village Administrator/PIO
Phone: (847) 599-7514
Fax: (847) 623-0490
Email: JLinehan@village.gurnee.il.us

Village of Gurnee Honors 2021 Teachers of the Year Recipients

GURNEE, IL – The Village of Gurnee is excited to announce the 2021 Gurnee Teacher of the Year recipients. The 2021 winners of the annual award are Mrs. Joy Barbknecht (Woodland District 50), Mr. Erik Sator & Mr. Len Wojciechowicz (Gurnee District 56) and Mrs. Robyn Kubik (Warren Township High School District 121).

These annual awards were created through the collaboration of the Village, school districts and local business owner Donald Henderson 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, schools and school district.

Mrs. Barbknecht started at Woodland in 2002 as a Woodland Middle School 8th grade Social Studies teacher. She has a BA from the University of New Mexico and an MAT from National Louis University. Woodland D50 received over 500 total nominations for the Teacher of the Year award, and Mrs. Barbknecht stood out as a happy and optimistic educator. She brings a positive attitude to the classroom and it quickly spreads to her students. She makes strong connections with her students, and builds trust easily by giving her students a voice in their education, and the day-to-day operation of the classroom.

Woodland District 50 Middle School Principal Tiffany Drake said, “We are extremely proud of Mrs. Barbknecht on her selection as the Village of Gurnee Teacher of the Year! I had the pleasure of standing in front of the 8th graders on her team to inform them that their beloved teacher is the best in town, and the smiles and applause from her students made for a memorable moment at Middle School. Congratulations to Joy on this well-deserved recognition and thank you for all you do for your students.”

Mr. Sator and Mr. Wojciechowicz are physical education teachers at Spaulding School with over 55 years of combined service to the district. Beyond traditional events such as Jump Rope for Heart and Field Day, Mr. Wojciechowicz and Mr. Sator hold a Turkey Trot, Mile Run, Bowling Night and an event that is so well attended they need to use the Warren Township High School gym—Dance Night. The two teachers were also innovative in the use of iPads for PE, including having students take photos of each other’s form and position during tumbling exercises.

Gurnee District 56 Superintendent Dr. Colleen Pacatte mentioned that both teachers were nominated as a pair as the two are “inseparable”. She stated, “if you have ever taken a PE class at Spaulding, you have

had Mr. Sator and Mr. Wojo. They have integrated reading and math skills in to their physical education curriculum in innovative ways and are always seeking new ways to improve the experience for students. The collaboration between these two long-time teachers is an exemplar for any teacher, at any grade level, seeking to partner or collaborate with a colleague.”

Mrs. Kubik has served in education for 16 years, including teaching at Warren Township High School for the last 14 years. Mrs. Kubik loves teaching because the classroom offers a unique work environment. “I have been fortunate to spend the majority of my time at Warren teaching Psychology,” said Kubik. “It is a course that I believe every student who takes it will benefit from. Psychology allows students to learn about themselves, how their brain works and how and why they act certain ways. The everyday connections that students can make to our course is infinite.”

District 121 Superintendent Dr. Ahlgrim said, “For 14 years, Robyn Kubik has been an incredibly powerful social studies teacher for Warren Township High School. She commits endless hours of preparation to ensure her students always have the tools they need for success in her psychology classes. Students benefit greatly from Robyn's positive outlook, energy and enthusiasm in the classroom. Robyn's commitment to continuous improvement for her courses and instructional practices are exemplary for our WTHS community. We are so proud to help recognize her as our Gurnee Teacher of the Year.”

Regarding the awards, Mayor Tom Hood said, “this is an opportunity we have to recognize the teachers in our community. Especially this year, the Gurnee teachers have done an awesome job of responding to the new teaching environment during the pandemic. I thank you all that you do.”

Mayor Tom Hood, Representative Joyce Mason and the Henderson Foundation presented awards to the winners on Monday, May 17th. In addition to the plaque recognizing their achievement, teachers received a monetary contribution from the Henderson Foundation.

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