School committee honors Gateway staff

Huntington – The Gateway Regional School Committee hosted their Annual Staff Honors Reception on Wednesday, May 24 in the Gateway Courtyard. Teachers, staff and retirees were celebrated at the event, with gifts and recognition for their accomplishments at Gateway.

First celebrated were achievements that were bestowed outside of Gateway. Three cafeteria managers were recognized for earning their Level I Certifications from the School Nutrition Association. This was achieved by successfully completing an online nutrition course and becoming Serv Safe certified. Food Services Director Wendy McCaul said, “This certification shows their commitment to School Nutrition and helps them stay current on the ever-changing school nutrition scene.” Recognized were Tasha Hartley, Gateway Cafeteria Manager; Wendy Koivisto, Littleville Cafeteria Manager, and Holly Whitaker, Chester Cafeteria Manager.

High school mathematics teacher Cheryl Wright was also recognized for receiving an “Unsung Hero” Award from St. Michael’s College in Vermont. In her comments, School Committee Chair Michele Crane said, “Perhaps no greater honor can be given to a teacher than having a former student nominate them for an award.” Brennan Foley, GRHS Class of ’16 nominated Wright during his freshman year. In his nomination, he wrote, “She is always concerned about us as people and not just students. We got way more than a great education. We got a great friend.” St. Mike’s uses their Teacher Recognition Program to honor those teachers who gave their students the academic skills and moral support necessary to be successful in post-secondary pursuits. Ms. Wright was unable to attend the event due to circumstances beyond her control.

Dan Shea was recognized as this year’s recipient of the Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Award. He has taught chemistry and physics at Gateway Regional High School for 11 ½ years. In addition to preparing students to be competitive in science at the college level, he mentors new teachers, is an adviser to Gateway’s As Schools Match Wits team (which made it to the semi-final round of the 2015 championship). Outside of Gateway, Dan directs the Camp H. A. Moses Scout Reservation in Russell, and also participates in NYLT, leadership training for young men in scouts.

Three retiring staff members, with a combined 70 years in the district, were also honored. Cat Chapin Bishop has taught high school English at Gateway for 12 of her 13 years of teaching. She has also served as a newspaper advisor and GSA advisor. Among her favorite memories: “helping students write about the things that really matter to them: about surviving violence or loss, caring for a sick parent, or learning to act, to dance, to lead a soccer team...about rescuing the eggs of endangered sea turtles, caring for abandoned dogs, and standing up for neighbors in need. Helping kids find a voice.” She says that she will miss her colleagues, and of course, the kids most of all.
Beth Harmon has been a Speech and Language Pathologist for the past 32 years, with 31 of those at Gateway. Beth said, “Some of my best memories are when we had Inclusion Programs in Grades 5 and 6 “double rooms”; the different Walk and Talk groups of students in the combined Physical and Language therapy group run by the PT and myself; opportunities to work collaboratively with teachers, therapists, paraprofessionals; and the opportunities of working with the same students and families from preschool all the way to high school.” She has also worked as an afterschool Title I Reading Tutor at Gateway, and as a Hearing Consultant.

Gail LaBonte was recognized after working for Gateway for 26 years in the Food Services Department. Director Wendy McCaul had this to say about Gail, “I think Gail will definitely miss the students. Seeing and implementing the many changes in school nutrition over the years has made her career very interesting.” One memory that stands out for Gail was her job during the renovations at Gateway. Meals were prepared in the new Littleville Elementary kitchen and then delivered by cart through the parking lot and work zone to the Welding Room, where the temporary Cafeteria was located. “Neither rain, nor wing, nor sleet, nor snow kept us from delivering food to the temporary café!”

This event is hosted each year by the School Committee, which provides refreshments, with support from the Grants/Community Relations office at Gateway. Communications Intern Allie Clark, who was on hand to assist with the awards, took the lead in organizing this year’s event.

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*Photo (left to right): Gateway’s Dan Shea, Cat Chapin Bishop, Gail LaBonte, Tasha Hartley, Wendy Koivisto, Holly Whitaker and Beth Harmon were all honored by the Gateway Regional School Committee on May 24.*