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Stars of Fox Cities Education to shine April 29

Eight award recipients and three finalists for “Educator of the Year” announced by Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce

FOX CITIES, Wis. (April 7 2021) – In a virtual ceremony April 29 on YouTube Premiere presented by Bergstrom Automotive and Menasha Corporation, the Fox Cities Chamber will present its 2021 Excellence in Education Shining Star Awards to 11 Fox Cities area education professionals.

This year’s honorees represent a wide variety of communities and professional specialties, but the common thread of commitment to education, students, innovation, and learning during a trying pandemic year runs through all of this year’s award recipients.

- The Excellence in Student Services Award will be presented to **Tracy Schmidt**, a school counselor at Little Chute Intermediate/Middle School. The longtime faculty member has been an enthusiastic ambassador for the community and was integral in piloting an Animal Assisted Learning Program for the district.
- The Excellence in Special Education Award will be presented to **Anita Koenig**, a teacher at Electa Quinney School in Kaukauna. Throughout her 18 years as a special educator, Koenig has demonstrated a daily commitment to the multifaceted needs of her students.
- The Excellence in Career and Technical Education Award will be presented to **Staci Sievert-Zahn** of Seymour High School. After 23 years as a social studies instructor, Sievert-Zahn entered the field of technical education and has flourished in the role over the past four years, advancing opportunities for Seymour students.
- The Inclusive Excellence in Education Award will be presented to **Lissette Cruz-Jimenez** of the Appleton Area School District’s diversity, equity, and inclusion office. Through her work, Cruz-Jimenez equips Appleton faculty, staff, and students with tools to create a culture of learning, understanding, and acceptance.
- The Excellence in Early Childhood Education Award will be presented to **Emily Rasmussen**, a teacher at Highlands Elementary School in Appleton. Rasmussen has used her expertise in early childhood education to craft an inclusive learning experience for her students that speaks to each child’s individual development and needs.
- The Excellence in K-12 Education Award will be presented by U.S. Venture to **Troy Wittmann**, a social studies and American history instructor at Maplewood Middle School in Menasha. Wittmann was nominated for consistently going above and beyond to bring history and culture alive for his students.

- The Excellence in Higher Education Award will be presented by The Boldt Company to **Wendy Potratz**, a senior lecturer in accounting at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. Potratz's nominators describe her as a faculty member who gets students excited about learning and helps ensure they are engaged in the community.
- The Heroes in COVID Award, which is being presented in 2021 only as a tribute to the unique sacrifices educators made in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, will go to the **Appleton Area School District (AASD) Special Education Department**. While other students and teachers were engaged in remote learning, Appleton's special education teachers worked in person with the students who needed it most. AASD serves more than 2,600 students with disabilities.

Three inspirational finalists have been named for the 2021 Educator of the Year Award; the winner will be announced during the video broadcast April 29. They include:

- **Bethany Andersen**, a K-5 math support specialist at Coolidge Elementary in Neenah whose expertise has elevated student learning and whose passion has inspired students—especially girls—in STEM
- **Karla Miller-Flynn**, a health education teacher at Kaukauna High School who inspires wellness not just in her students but throughout her community with a commitment to promoting healthy lifestyles, both mental and physical
- **Tim Van Eperen**, a choral music instructor at Little Chute Middle/High School whose passion for the performing arts inspires his students as he works actively to promote student music in the community

The first-ever Excellence in Education Shining Star Awards were presented at an in-person ceremony in 2020; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic this year's second-annual event will be virtual. To learn more about this awards program and get information about viewing the awards presentations via YouTube Premiere on April 29 at 6 p.m., visit the Fox Cities Chamber website at www.foxcitieschamber.com.

This year's awards are presented by Bergstrom Automotive and Menasha Corporation, with award sponsorship support from The Boldt Company and U.S. Venture. Media sponsors include Image Studios and Debbie Daanen Photography.

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