

Blue Ridge Community College

Times-News Column

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For more than 20 years Blue Ridge Community College Educational Foundation has presented annual awards to faculty and staff who demonstrate work and personal ethics that go well beyond their job description. The employees honored are recognized for their invaluable contributions, outstanding dedication, competence, conscientious performance, and ingenuity which translate to a significant impact for our students and to the fulfillment of the College's mission.

The College promotes the importance of health in the productivity, well-being, and retention of its faculty and staff. The College also strongly encourages the integration of good health into all facets of community college life. The Foundation commends an employee who has exhibited sound methods and proven results. This year's recipient of the Wellness Employee of the Year is Automotive Restoration Faculty Stan Ducker. Stan has lived a very health-conscious lifestyle. He adheres to a commitment of daily walks, frequently hikes the trails of the western North Carolina mountains, and works out at the gym. This employee follows a very strict diet, staying away from sweets and eating as many locally grown fruits and vegetables as possible. His sound methods and proven results have made him a role model for employee wellness, and the continued success of Blue Ridge Community College.

Past College President Dr. David W. Sink, Jr., established the Community Service Award through Blue Ridge Community College Educational Foundation to recognize a College employee who meets the criterion of exceptional service to the community unrelated to their College responsibilities. This year's recipient Library Assistant Cathy Calure never expects any recognition or praise, this recipient gives her time, talents, financial resources, energy, and love to many areas of need. She volunteers one Saturday a month and on an as-needed basis as a thrift store cashier for the domestic violence and sexual assault prevention and treatment center Steps to HOPE. For the last two years, she has knitted hats for men, women, and children all year long. When the weather turns wintry, she mails the hats to the homeless shelter Central Union Mission in Washington, DC. Annually, she has donated 80 to 90 hats. Her love for all creatures has led her to service in our area as a Certified Wildlife Rehabilitator providing life-saving protection and rehabilitation for numerous animals.

The next award, Dr. Eliza B. Graue Extra Mile Award, commends an instructor who has in some special way touched the lives of students at Blue Ridge Community College. This year's recipient Office Administration Faculty Leanne Ruff was nominated with high praise from her students. These are comments from current Blue Ridge Community College students: "Last fall, I lost my job due to the economy. I faced the decision of trying to find another job (and those are few and far between) or returning to school. It had been 30 years since I had been in school." For another student it had been 45 years.

Both students commented on how their faculty advisor talked with them about their options and provided them with encouragement and confidence. And, both students contributed their success in other classes and making the dean's list to their instructor who went the "extra mile."

New this year is the Dr. Molly A. Parkhill Staff Person of the Year Award. Established by our current president, the Dr. Molly A. Parkhill Staff Person of the Year Award recognizes a full-time, non-instructional employee for individual achievement and exceptional contributions to Blue Ridge Community College. Criteria for this award include personal and professional development, service to the College, leadership, initiative, and exceptional performance. This year's recipient Dean for Economic and Workforce Development Julie Thompson came to the College 30 years ago to establish its first Career Center. Then in 1991 she was given the additional responsibility for Cooperative Education and, in 1997, developed a local JobReady initiative by forming a partnership with Henderson County Public Schools, Chamber of Commerce officials, and local business representatives. Also in the late 1990s, she accepted the directorship of the Henderson County JobLink Career Center. Her 30-year career at Blue Ridge Community College demonstrates significant contributions in education, training, and retraining of the local workforce, in providing services to and forming partnerships with local businesses, and in providing services that have improved the quality of life in this community.

The final award, Dr. and Mrs. William D. Killian Outstanding Teacher Award, was established by founding President William Killian and his wife Helen. Nominated and chosen by fellow faculty members, the Dr. and Mrs. William D. Killian Outstanding Teacher Award recognizes a faculty member's commitment to teaching excellence. This year's recipient English and Reading Faculty Caren Kessler teaches a wide variety of courses allows this year's recipient to keep up with her students throughout their studies at the College. She is an advisor for College Transfer students, Nursing students, and students who want to enter articulated health care programs. She guides with firm counsel when it is needed and is always available for help and guidance. A colleague writes, "I find her to be a great role model in holding our students to high standards. She is also always willing to help when I have a question and offers positive advice." Outside of the classroom, she holds leadership roles beyond the classroom related to the practice and profession of teaching. She chaired our Quality Enhancement Plan Committee for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' visit, which addressed student readiness for online classes. This plan will help with student retention and completion of the student's chosen degree. Caren will represent the College in the statewide competition for the 2011 North Carolina Community College System Excellence in Teaching Award.

Congratulations to all these recipients. It is dedicated and caring people like Stan, Cathy, Julie, Leanne, and Caren that make Blue Ridge Community College a great place to work and learn.