



SPECIAL EDITION



Issue 3, 2017

SSD Teacher Retiring After 40 Years in Riverview Gardens District

“You have to be flexible.”

That’s the most important piece of advice SSD teacher Karen Lestmann has to offer new teachers.

“You have to be ready to adjust to whatever happens any given day,” she said. “Things change really frequently; programs change, expectations change and paperwork changes,” she added.

Lestmann has likely seen it all in her career as a teacher. She retired from SSD at the end of this school year after 40 years of teaching. Even more remarkable is the fact she has spent all 40 of those years with SSD working in the Riverview Gardens School District.

“The first three months I was a teaching assistant at Bermuda School in Ferguson-Florissant,” Lestmann said. “Then, I was supposed to be coming over to Riverview to cover a maternity leave, but the teacher never came back and I just stayed.”

Lestmann did more than just stay. She became one of the most respected teachers in Riverview Gardens, winning a teacher of the year award three times in that district.

Many teachers will work for several different districts in their tenures, and while Lestmann says she did look at transferring once, she’s glad she has stayed with Riverview Gardens.

“I looked at transferring because it was like 10 minutes from my house and near my daughter’s high school, but it just didn’t work out. I didn’t pursue it; I’ve always felt comfortable here,” she said.

While she has been with the same schools for her entire career, she has worn many different hats for SSD and Riverview Gardens.

“When I started, I had a self-contained (class),” Lestmann said. “The class was moved around several schools for a few years; I worked at Riverview Elementary, Lemasters

(Elementary), Danforth (Elementary) — all in a self-contained classroom.”

Administrators from both SSD and Riverview Gardens agree that Lestmann’s years of experience make her an invaluable colleague.

“Karen has been a model for professional practice for all staff,” said Howard Fields, principal at Koch Elementary in Riverview Gardens. “Her outlook and commitment to this community is evident in her desire to help all students, not just students who receive special education services.”

“She is internally motivated by providing the best services to students and seeing them grow,” said Max Pott, SSD area coordinator intern in Riverview Gardens. “She makes the other teachers around her better, both general education and SSD teachers.”

As she entered the final weeks of the school year, Lestmann took time to savor each and every victory her students achieved.

“I will miss seeing the excitement on the students’ faces when they meet a goal or accomplish something they have worked really hard on,” Lestmann said. “(And) watching how much they grow and change in all aspects from kindergarten on up.”

Times changed and Lestmann adapted to those changes. She moved from self-contained class settings to the resource setting, eventually settling into her role in primary education at Koch Elementary. Through all of those changes, her mission remained the same.

“I hope I have had a positive impact on (the students’) lives that they can carry with them in the future,” she said. ■



Karen Lestmann

STUDENTS HONORED FOR ACHIEVE

On April 27, 2017, SSD recognized the outstanding achievements of local students at the annual Commitment to Kids banquet. This year, 22 students received the Rosemary Zander Award. Others were honored with financial scholarships for college and summer camps.

The Rosemary Zander Award has long recognized the accomplishments of students receiving services from SSD. Since 1988, students have been honored for success in a variety of categories – academics, arts, athletics, communications, vocational training, employment, independent living skills, community service and extracurricular activities.

Each of the 2017 award recipients has diverse achievements and has had varied challenges to meet and overcome. And they all have demonstrated the central mission of SSD – all students can learn, succeed and make successful contributions to our community.

Read about several of this year's Rosemary Zander Award recipients to the right. To learn more about each award winner's inspiring story, visit <http://bit.ly/c2k2017> to read their individual profiles and watch a video featuring the honorees.



Julius Jones

Julius Jones is a young man who has come full circle in his life.

When Julius started as a freshman at Hazelwood West High School, he needed significant assistance in staying focused on his educational and behavioral goals, said SSD teacher Denise Inman, who nominated Julius for the Rosemary Zander Award.

During the four years since, he has made exceptional progress and been an inspiration to the students and teachers with whom he works.

"I have seen Julius grow from a troubled and difficult student into a mature, respectful, hardworking and focused young man," Inman said. "I have known many students over the years, but I have never seen such a complete turnaround in a student as I have in Julius."

Julius has been working with the Normandy Police Department in their Police Explorer program for the last several years. His future plans include taking criminal justice classes at community college and then attending the police academy to become a police officer.

Inman said Julius has also become a role model for other students.

"I have seen how caring and compassionate he is with the underclassmen who are struggling," she said. "He is not afraid to talk about the problems he had and how he was able to turn things around."



Ruby Bond

Ruby Bond, a student who receives services from SSD at Hudson Elementary School in the Webster Groves School District, has overcome adversity and has done so with a smile on her face and a positive attitude.

When Ruby started first grade, she was able to run, jump and play. But within a year, things drastically changed in her physical abilities. Ruby receives vision, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech services from SSD. In a very short time, she found that her eyesight had deteriorated, she had poor balance and she had limited use of her hands.

Getting through the school day required much more effort and assistance. But as her body faced more challenges, her attitude remained upbeat and positive.

Ruby learned to become her own self-advocate, and knows her limits and when to ask for help. She's always open to new ideas to make her life easier. And when she knows she is ready to increase her independence and reduce the support she is getting, she speaks up and tells an adult.

She has made vast improvements to regain some of the physical components that she lost, and her attitude has been key from day one.

"Ruby has learned more life lessons in her first eight years than many people learn throughout their school career," said SSD physical therapist Laurie Dahle. "We all face adversity in life and it is up to us to determine how we are going to handle it. Ruby has shown us that being upbeat and looking for the good in life every day is a better way to live."

MENTS



Davion Brothers

Davion Brothers is taking ownership of his education at Parkway West Middle School. He was born with cerebral palsy, but as he prepares to transition to high school, he doesn't let his diagnosis keep him from reaching his goals.

"He has a great attitude and is always ready to learn," said Kari Kenyon, an SSD special education teacher. "He loves school."

One of Davion's strengths is advocating for himself. He lets his teachers know what he needs to succeed.

"He is amazing at finding new tools to use in the classroom," Kenyon said.

In the past, Davion used the head array on his wheelchair to help type messages on computers. Recently, though, Davion told his teachers that he wanted a new tool for typing. Now he uses a pointer device to type on a keyboard, punch keys on a calculator, paint and draw.

"Davion tells us what he can do, and what he wants to do, so that he can learn and grow upon that," Kenyon said.

Now with this new tool in his repertoire, there is no stopping Davion.

"He loves sending emails. He sends emails to his mom, me and other teachers in the building," Kenyon said.

It is just another utensil for Davion to use to self-advocate. It's that determination that has made him a presence throughout the school.

"His smile, kind words, eagerness to learn and perseverance with daily activities at school are inspiring," Kenyon said.

2017 ROSEMARY ZANDER AWARD RECIPIENTS*

Ruby Bond
Hudson Elementary School,
Webster Groves School District

Davion Brothers
Parkway West Middle School,
Parkway Schools

Cameron Brown
Drummond Elementary School,
Pattonville School District

Kathryn Bruening
Great Circle, Special School District

CJ Colvin
Veterans Affairs Medical Center
Vocational Skills Program,
Special School District

Max Daniels
Walter Ambrose Family Center,
Webster Groves School District

Khyla Davis-Johnson
Hazelwood West High School,
Hazelwood School District

John Hardcastle
Monsanto - Creve Coeur Vocational
Skills Program, Special School District

Mitchell Herndon
Affton High School,
Affton School District

Julius Jones
Hazelwood West High School,
Hazelwood School District

Eric Kaiser
St. John Vianney High School,
Special School District (SNAP Program)

Annie Kilcullen
Northeast Middle School,
Parkway Schools

John McManemin
Lindbergh High School,
Lindbergh Schools

Katelynn Meyer
Bellerive Elementary School,
Parkway Schools

TJ Miller
Hazelwood West High School,
Hazelwood School District

Michael Noonan
Bernard Middle School,
Mehlville School District

Aniya Pate
Blades Elementary School,
Mehlville School District

Christian Roldan
Nipher Middle School,
Kirkwood School District

Elise Schiller
Kirkwood High School,
Kirkwood School District

Michael Thornton
Neuwoehner High School,
Special School District

Camron Young
LaSalle Springs Middle School,
Rockwood School District

*One student preferred not to be named.

2017 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

[Sammy Goldman "Living Big" Campership](#)

Isabel Soriano
McGrath Elementary School,
Brentwood School District

[Laura K. Sherman Laughlin Campership](#)

Edward D. Fraysher
Sperrong Middle School,
Lindbergh Schools

[Allison M. Haake Memorial Scholarship](#)

Joseph Parks
Lindbergh High School,
Lindbergh Schools

[James E. Westbury Memorial Board of Education Scholarships](#)

TJ Miller
Hazelwood West High School,
Hazelwood School District

Michael Woodland
Lindbergh High School,
Lindbergh Schools

Blanca Mariscal-Garcia
Hazelwood Central High School,
Hazelwood School District

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[Bonhomme Lions Scholarships](#)

Ana Sophia Bailot
Marquette High School,
Rockwood School District

Demeechie Beach
Ritenour High School/North Technical
High School, Ritenour School District/
Special School District

Kelly Komotos
Webster Groves High School,
Webster Groves School District

Will McCracken
Kirkwood High School,
Kirkwood School District

SEF Awards Scholarships

The Special Education Foundation awarded six scholarships to students with disabilities at an event on June 1.

[John Cary Scholarships](#)

Ana Sophia Bailot
Marquette High School,
Rockwood School District

Erin Gardner
Parkway West High School,
Parkway Schools

Kelly Komotos
Webster Groves High School,
Webster Groves School District

Michaela A. Okosi
Hazelwood Central High School,
Hazelwood School District

[Jo Anne Tierney Sauer Scholarship](#)

Joseph Parks
Lindbergh High School,
Lindbergh Schools

[Christopher Davis Scholarship](#)

Dejah Gabrielle House
Ritenour High School,
Ritenour School District



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MISSION: In collaboration with partner districts, we provide technical education and a wide variety of individualized educational and support services designed for each student's successful contribution to our community.

VISION: Partners for every student's success

VALUES: student success • collaboration
• integrity • stewardship • continuous improvement • equity

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Special School District does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation against an individual based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation, ancestry, disability, veteran status, age, or activity protected by federal or state law in its programs, activities and employment and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. Direct inquiries and complaints under this policy to Special School District's Director – Compliance Liaison, 12110 Clayton Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63131, telephone (314) 989-8100 or to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, One Peticcoat Lane, 1010 Walnut Street, 3rd Floor, Suite 320, Kansas City, Missouri 64106, telephone (816) 268-0550, fax (816) 268-0599, TDD (800) 877-8339, email OCR.KansasCity@ed.gov. Information about the existence and location of services, activities, and facilities accessible to impaired persons can be obtained from the Special School District's Director – Compliance Liaison at the phone number and address listed above.

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NEWS FROM SSD



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Help the SEF Help Students

The Dan McLaughlin Golf Tournament is the Special Education Foundation's biggest fundraiser of the year, raising nearly \$300,000 in 2016. This year's event, scheduled for Oct. 9 at Norwood Hills Country Club, supports the programs the SEF provides to students with disabilities. Many volunteers on the tournament committee and on the day of the event are SSD employees or parents of students served by the District.



SSD Vocational Skills Program students send off golfers with a big thank you.

Here are some ways that you can help:

- Put together a foursome to play golf or attend the dinner auction.
- Send a kid to camp – raise \$250 with your friends or group.
- Sell raffle tickets or buy some yourself!
- Donate an auction item or ask the businesses you patronize to donate.
- Introduce the SEF to someone who might be interested in being a sponsor.
- Dine at California Pizza Kitchen and mention Special Education Foundation on any Tuesday in October, and part of the proceeds will benefit the SEF.
- Most importantly, put the SEF's programs to work for students. Nominate a student for the leadership program or apply for a scholarship or campership. SSD teachers can apply for mini-grants.

For information about SEF programs or to help with the golf tournament, visit www.sef-stl.org or contact karen@sef-stl.org. ■