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Anderson Columbia Co. Inc. honored at annual event;

Shannon Ellison recognized as Dixie County Teacher of the Year



Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas (left) and School Board Chairman Tim Alexander prepare to start the luncheon.

Story, Photos and Video

By Jeff M. Hardison © March 4, 2018 at 7:58 p.m.

DIXIE COUNTY -- The 13th Annual Dixie County Education Business Partnership Luncheon provided an opportunity for leaders of the Dixie County School District to honor employees and to recognize a business interest that has helped the county for three generations.

Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas led the program that included recognition of the Business Partner of the Year, Teachers of the Year, Educational Staff Professionals of the Year and more.

The Rev. Dwayne Kight of Faith Baptist Church of Old Town provided the meal. Pulled pork, chicken, green beans, potato salad, tossed salad and desserts were available for 160 people. The pastor also gave the invocation at the start of the event.

Members of the Superintendent's Council were among the students who served food and drink.

Dixie County School Board Chairman Tim Alexander opened the program] by welcoming everyone and thanking guests for taking time to help honor these deserving interests.

By business interests and community leaders giving monetary and other resources to support the district year after year, the school district continues to be able to provide

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successful students with what they need for the performance they show.

“From the bottom of our heart,” Alexander said on behalf of the School Board and Superintendent Thomas, “we thank you for all that you do, all of the support that you pour out.”

Superintendent of Schools Thomas said the school district provides an environment where all children can reach their full potential as the result of the partnership between business and education.

He introduced the School Board – Chairman Alexander, Vice Chairman Paul Gainey, Board Member Crystal Bush, Board Member Charles Farmer, and Board Member Dwayne Rollison. Thomas also mentioned that School Board Attorney M. Michael O’Steen was present.



Third Judicial Circuit Chief Judge Wesley R. Douglas (left) and Dixie County Sheriff Dewey Hatcher Sr. are among the elected leaders at the event. Among the representatives from military groups at the event was American Legion 3rd District Commander Mike Hutto, who is from the Post 383 of Old Town.

Other elected officials beyond the School Board and superintendent present at the event included Dixie County Sheriff Dewey Hatcher Sr., Third Judicial Circuit Chief Judge Wesley R. Douglas, Dixie County Supervisor of Elections Starlett Cannon and Cross City Mayor Tank Lee.

Thomas mentioned that the Dixie County School District values its membership in the North East Florida Educational Consortium. NEFEC Executive Director Dr. Patrick Wnek was recognized at the opening of the luncheon.

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Retired educators and members of the Dixie County Education Foundation were recognized at the outset of the event as well.

BUSINESS PARTNER OF THE YEAR



Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas stands with Megan Land of Anderson Columbia Co. Inc. as she accepts the plaque for the Business Partner of the Year on behalf of the company.

The 2018 Dixie County Business Partner of the Year was presented to Anderson Columbia Co. Inc.

From its origin as a local contractor in 1958, Anderson Columbia Co. Inc. has successfully grown to become one of the largest construction firms in the Southeast United States.

The company is a diversified materials producer with aggregate, crushed stone, and sand and gravel operations in Florida, Georgia, and Texas, cement operations in Florida, and asphalt operations in Florida and Texas.

As Superintendent of School Thomas spoke about Anderson Columbia, he said, children of the late Joe H. Anderson, Jr. --Joey, Doug and Cindy -- were an integral part of the company founded by their father.

Those three individuals took the reins in the 1990s and were building bridges and highways, Thomas said. They helped develop airports, landfills and other large commercial interests as well, he added.

Today, he continued, there are third-generations Anderson family members who operate this multiple award-winning construction company.

The Anderson family has provided jobs for many local people over the past several decades, Thomas said, as well as to residents of surrounding counties. The family always has been community-oriented and has contributed significantly to the betterment of the quality of life of residents and visitors of Dixie County and other counties.

For many years, he said, the Anderson family has been extremely supportive of public

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education in Dixie County, providing many DCHS graduates with job opportunities in the construction industry. Likewise, Anderson Columbia Co. Inc., has provided scholarships to many deserving DCHS graduating seniors, Thomas said.

This family dedicated acreage that was needed for the current location of Old Town Elementary School, Thomas said.

TEACHERS OF THE YEAR



(from left) Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas; Anderson Elementary School Teacher of the Year Connie Everett with first grader Steve Davidson; Old Town Elementary School Teacher of the Year Cassandra Sheppard with third grader Skylar Love; Ruth Rains Middle School Teacher of the Year Jaccilen Abraham with sixth grader Wynlee Fox; and Dixie County High School Teacher of the Year (and Dixie County Teacher of the Year) Shannon Ellison with 11th grader Calista Amrell pause for a photo opportunity.

The four teachers of the year in Dixie County were each introduced by a student.

Anderson Elementary School Teacher of the Year Connie Everett was introduced by first grader Steve Davidson. This first speaker from among the student body of the school district stood on a chair to speak at the podium.

Davidson must set the bar for his classmates because his public speaking skills are

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spot-on.

“I love my teacher Miss Connie,” he said. “Miss Connie keeps us safe and teaches us.”

During his speech, this first grader shared with the listeners that his class’s teacher helps students to their best. Everett teaches the students as they read that they can look back at a story to find answers, Davidson said.

He is happy that she “... makes my brain grow. All and all she is the best around.”

He then read the poem *Why God Made Teachers*, written by Kevin William Huff.

Old Town Elementary School Teacher of the Year Cassandra D. Sheppard was introduced by third grader Skylar Love.

The third grader mentioned that Sheppard is in her fourth year at this school and was voted by her peer teachers as Teacher of the Month, and then was elected as Teacher of the Year at Old Town Elementary School.

Before coming to Old Town, Sheppard taught sixth- and eighth-grade mathematics at Chiefland Middle School, Love said.

This teacher, her student said, retired as a captain from the United States Army Reserve, where she served during a 20-year career in that profession.

Love said she is especially happy that her teacher started Flagettes at Old Town Elementary School. The Flagettes have performed in parades and elsewhere.

Respect, dedication and inspiration are some of the core values her students learn through this extracurricular activity, Love said as she spoke about Sheppard.

Ruth Rains Middle School Teacher of the Year Jaccilen Abraham was introduced by sixth grader Wynlee Fox.

Abraham has an eight-year history as a teacher, Fox said, adding that the past two years has been in Dixie County.

Fox said this teacher makes learning an enjoyable experience.

“He is always encouraging,” she added, “and he goes out of his way for others. Mr. Abraham is a very wonderful teacher. I am glad to have him as one of my teachers.”

Dixie County High School Teacher of the Year Shannon Ellison was introduced by 11th grader Calista Amrell.

Amrell said she has been in Ellison’s classes for two years now. Of all teachers in Dixie County, Amrell said, Ellison stands out the most.

This teacher, the student said, shows her care for every single student. Ellison demonstrates her care for students by asking them about their plans for their lives after high school and college, Amrell said.

Not only is Ellison an excellent teacher, Amrell said, but her talent as the Beta Club sponsor is extraordinary.

Amrell said she sees Ellison as her best teacher ever and as being very deserving of the Dixie County High School Teacher of the Year award.

Ellison also earned the 2018 Dixie County Teacher of the Year title.

Superintendent Thomas added to what DCHS student Amrell said about 2017-2018 Teacher of the Year Shannon Ellison.

Ellison exceeds the standards required of 21st Century educators, Thomas said.

Ellison has been employed by the Dixie County School System for 24 years, Thomas said.

Ellison chairs the DCHS Social Studies Department, Thomas said as he spoke about the top teacher’s success.

“She has been instrumental in the department taking the lead in advance placement

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courses and our students' AVID college readiness skills," Thomas said. "In addition, she serves as the school's activities chair, coordinating the school calendar at Dixie County High School."

Ellison mentors her colleagues who are sponsors at DCHS, as well as mentoring and assisting coaches and other school leaders, he said.

This teacher has served as the Beta Club sponsor for 22 years, Thomas said as he spoke about some of Ellison's history. Ellison was the sponsor of student government for 11 years, he continued, and taught leadership class for seven years.

"She has a humble servant nature," Thomas said. "She is loved by parents, staff and students."

Ellison is committed to the success and advancement of all students, he said.

EDUCATIONAL STAFF PROFESSIONALS OF THE YEAR



(from left) Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas; Daira Carr, Jenny Mikell, Dominga Trask, Tammy Kelly and Lynnette Allen are the Dixie County Educational Staff Professionals of the Year. (Not picture - Joie Lambert)

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The Educational Staff Professionals of the Year are among the team who serve a vital role in the Dixie County School District Superintendent Thomas said.

The superintendent explained why each person earned the recognition during the program on Friday afternoon.

The top people in six parts of the school district are James M. Anderson Elementary School - Daira Carr; Old Town Elementary School - Jenny Mikell; Ruth Rains Middle School - Dominga Trask; Dixie County High School - Tammy Kelly; Transportation - Joie Lambert and District Level - Lynette Allen.

The Dixie County Educational Staff Professional of the Year is Jenny Mikell of Old Town Elementary School.

SUPERINTENDENT'S COUNCIL



Four members of the Superintendent's Council who were among the servers at the luncheon are (from left) Sydney Groom, Deneshia McDowell, Raegan Von Stein and Lily Doxtater.

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Among the drink servers at the luncheon are (from left) Cade Thomas, a senior; Candice Rollison, a senior; and Idalis Vasquez, a junior who is a member of the Superintendent's Council.

Five juniors and five seniors who were selected by high school students, teachers and administrators help the superintendent have insight from their perspectives.

The 10 members of the Superintendent's Council also learn about the function of the school and the school district.

The 10 members this year are seniors -- Aaron Dawson, Sydney Groom, Whitney Hodge, Leanna Medlin, Dennis Sumney III, and juniors -- Lily Doxtater, Kyla McCaskill, Deneshia McDowell, Raegan Von Stein and Idalis Vasquez.

SUPERINTENDENT'S TEAM MEMBERS

Superintendent Thomas said his office relies on having a strong team of professionals. The members of this group that he mentioned during the annual luncheon are Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Business Services Tonya Howell; Director of Safety, Facilities, and Special Projects Jerry Wayne Evans; Director of Student Services and ESE Alexa Mills; and Director of Elementary and Secondary Education Buddy Schofield.

Other members in the administration of the Dixie County School District who the superintendent recognized are principals of four schools -- Old Town Elementary School Principal Karen Tillis; James M. Anderson Elementary School Principal Kristen McCaskill; Ruth Rains Middle School Principal Chris Lord; and Dixie County High School Principal Diana Locke.

The guest speaker this year was Dr. Brian Dopson of Florida Gateway College.

The keynote speaker said it is important for educators to prepare students for the future.

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Change is occurring quickly, he said, and it young people need to be ready for innovation such as self-driving cars, and computers that can “think” for themselves.



Moments before concluding the luncheon with a couple of musical pieces, seen here are Kentrell Hall, DCHS Band Director William Malloy, Tyler Johnson, Branden Brown, Daelon Joslin, Riggs Ross and Nora Barrow.

While the college representative stressed the need for study in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, the program ended with students who excel in the performing arts.

Dixie County High School Band Director William Malloy brought six musicians he calls his “Heavy Hitters” because “They don’t fold under pressure.

Director Malloy joined the students to perform a couple of songs to conclude the afternoon event.