



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2025

For more information contact:

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Derby Public Schools I Make A Difference Award Winners Announced at Board of Education Meeting on April 28

Desert Gosch and Amanda Hawkinson, staff, and Kyle Downs, volunteer, are the April recipients of the I Make A Difference Award.

This month's Staff I Make A Difference Award winners are Desert Gosch and Amanda Hawkinson, Special Education Teachers at Stone Creek Elementary. Desert and Amanda exemplify the qualities of dedication, hard work and commitment to excellence in their everyday teaching. Together these two create a strong team for special education at Stone Creek, with Desert teaching kindergarten through second grade students and Amanda teaching third through fifth graders.

Desert transferred to Stone Creek Elementary in January of 2023 to assist with the school's increased student caseload. Since then, she has tackled new challenges and adopted Stone Creek traditions, bringing cheer and laughter.

Desert is an inspiring hands-on problem solver. When issues arise, she doesn't hesitate to support both students and staff. Her ability to think on her feet, collaborate with others, and maintain a fast-paced, go-getter work ethic is truly impressive. Whether it's managing extra online classes or creating daily schedules, Desert handles her responsibilities with grace and efficiency, ensuring that accommodations are in place and that school days run smoothly for students.

Her teaching counterpart, shared "Desert is an extraordinary special education teacher whose dedication, creativity and dependability sets her apart. She consistently goes above and beyond to support her students, finding innovative, out-of-the-box solutions to help each child succeed. Her flexibility and unwavering commitment to meeting individual needs create an environment where every student feels valued and empowered." This is a testament to Desert's support, diligence and collaborative leadership.

Amanda's influence and work continues to push students towards their flight paths at Stone Creek Elementary. To further support her profession, Amanda is pursuing her doctorate, mentoring new employees in the Special Education Department and overseeing IEPs outside of Stone Creek, all while raising three boys. Illustrated by the words of her teaching counterpart, "Through challenges and triumphs, she has proven that her loyalty and heart are as big as her work ethic."

Amanda has worked to build a special education program that openly communicates with parents, unifies
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teachers and paraprofessionals. As an educator, she is constantly seeking new ideas, resources and ways to support her students. The Paraprofessionals in her classroom said “Amanda is very approachable and always available. When our team needs ideas regarding students, she delivers. She consistently makes everyone’s day at work more manageable. She listens and we are blessed to work with her.” Amanda’s passion and dedication to teaching make her a strong leader and an inspiration. Desert’s and Amanda’s ability to lead with compassion and embrace every challenge is evident through their commitment to the success of every student at Stone Creek.

This month’s volunteer I Make A Difference Award winner is Kyle Downs, who is President of Derby’s Wrestling Club and supports the middle and high school wrestling programs. Kyle Downs is a Kansas Highway Patrolman and a family man, who gives back to the Derby community in many ways. As the president of the Derby Wrestling Club he gives his knowledge and support to students in the youth, middle school and high school wrestling programs, ensuring the programs are able to merge together and remain in sync. With the wrestling club being active year-round, Kyle, and his family, volunteer a significant amount of time to the student-athletes and their families.

His dedication goes beyond the sport, he also supports the organization and setup of wrestling events for the school seasons. He and his family have been key to the success of the B-team wrestling tournament hosted by Derby Middle School. Year after year, the teams and patrons who attend the tournament consistently praise how well-organized and smoothly it runs. This is a direct reflection of the effort Kyle puts into every aspect of the event, often behind the scenes. Each year, he shows up the day before the tournament to help set up the facility. With his knowledge of running successful club tournaments, he is a guiding force in ensuring that the event goes well. His whole family is always willing to assist wherever needed, including announcing, running scoreboards or officiating.

One area where Kyle has truly made a big impact is in the growth of girls wrestling. His daughter Brooke, who is on the Derby High School Wrestling team, was one of the pioneers for girls wrestling in Derby. Growing up, she had to compete against boys, but Kyle’s efforts made sure that today’s young female wrestlers have the opportunities she didn’t. He is one of the individuals who have been instrumental in helping establish and grow the new middle school girls wrestling program and continues to advocate for these athletes to ensure they have every opportunity to succeed. Kelly Heincker, Head Wrestling Coach at Derby High School shared, “Kyle lives his life in service of others... His leadership is seen in all facets of our wrestling program as well as in our community. He leads by example and models the character that we hope to instill in our young athletes.” Kyle’s dedication to service and encouragement of student-athletes have left a lasting impact on both the Derby Wrestling Club and our community.

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Pictured: (Pictured left to right) Amanda Hawkinson, Kyle Downs and Desert Gosch

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