



Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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Former Woodstock High School choir director wins 2025 Susan Palmore Award of Excellence

Legendary former choir director Paul Rausch was named the recipient of the 2025 Susan Palmore Award of Excellence, presented by the Woodstock D200 Education Foundation on Thursday, Oct. 16.

Rausch, a longtime music educator at Woodstock High School who retired in 2017, was recognized for his extraordinary contributions to Woodstock Community Unit School District 200's performing arts programs and his lasting impact on thousands of students throughout his distinguished career.

Mike Moan, superintendent of schools, nominated Rausch for the award, marking its return after a hiatus since the COVID-19 pandemic. Foundation co-President Diana Frisbie presented Rausch with the award, surrounded by D200 staff at Woodstock North High School.

"In my mind, there was one overwhelming choice, and that was Paul Rausch," Moan said. "It is hard to think about the amazing opportunities our students have in District 200 performing arts today and not think of Paul and what he built and what he has helped sustain."

Rausch's achievements include being named a finalist for Illinois Teacher of the Year. Under his leadership, Woodstock High School's choir program gained statewide recognition, including being featured in the Chicago Sun-Times as an exemplar of excellence, where being an athlete and choir member was celebrated equally.

"I see so many incredible educators here. District 200 is a place where I was able to grow and develop as an educator, but it's a community that helps us. I thank you, I thank the leadership, the board, and the students because that's why we're here," Rausch said after receiving the award.

Building a Legacy of Excellence

As noted by speakers Moan, Education Foundation member Larry Baier, former music teacher Pam Camp, and former D200 Superintendent Ellen Wrzeski, Rausch created a culture of excellence that extended far beyond music education. He set

high standards while teaching students how to achieve them, demanding dedication and perseverance while giving even more of himself. The results were remarkable:

- Performances on WGN television
- Sold-out holiday concerts and madrigal dinners in increasingly larger venues
- International performances that showcased Woodstock students to amazed worldwide audiences
- Hundreds of graduates who became music professionals and educators

"Paul showed our students the world and taught them not to fear it," Moan said. "Thousands of students had the experience of being challenged, supported, and celebrated in a program that produced amazing music but really so much more—amazing people with the skills needed to survive and prosper in life."

A Career of Service

Beyond the music classroom, Rausch served as a track coach, union officer, and strong community advocate. His dedication to District 200 extended even into retirement, when he returned to fill a one-year position at North, approaching the role with his characteristic commitment and achieving outstanding results.

"Paul dedicated his career to making WHS and District 200 an amazing place for our students to be musicians and for our teachers to be professionals," Moan said.

About the Susan Palmore Award of Excellence

The award is named after Susan Palmore, who exemplified service to her community in her roles as a District 200 Board of Education trustee and member of the D200 Education Foundation. The Education Foundation renamed the Award of Excellence honor after Palmore's death in 2012 to continue her legacy.

Wrzeski noted that Rausch shared many similar qualities with Palmore in their advocacy for D200 and its students, as well as in their demand for excellence.

"The passion, the drive, the tenacity, the fortitude, the creativity, the willingness to give students opportunities — all of these things wrapped around that belief in public education that loyalty to district 200, and in this case, of course, that tremendous loyalty to the music program and to the fine arts in general," Wrzeski said.

The award recognizes outstanding contributions to District 200 and exemplifies the dedication to educational excellence that defines both Palmore's service and the district's mission.

Past recipients include: Bud Swartout (2011); Barb Banker (2012); Bill Schuette (2013); Jim Campion (2014); Miguel Rodriguez (2015); Joy Aavang (2016); John Van Fleet (2017); Ron Bendis (2018); Ken Morozink (2019); Robert Hackbart (2020)