



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2025

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Derby Public Schools I Make A Difference Award Winners Announced at Board of Education Meeting on September 22

Lori Rorabaugh, staff, and the team at Woodlawn United Methodist Thrift Shop, volunteer, are the September recipients of the I Make A Difference Award.

This month's Staff I Make A Difference Award winner is Lori Rorabaugh, Math Paraprofessional at Tanglewood Elementary. Lori brings joy, enthusiasm and a commitment to student success every single day. Each morning, she welcomes Tanglewood students with high energy, often through a fun song or dance, to get them excited for the day of learning ahead.

At Tanglewood, Lori is always prepared and dedicated to helping students reach their math goals. Over the summer, she attended additional training to strengthen her skills with the Math Bridges intervention program. Her preparation shows, as students often share that Lori is a reason they look forward to their math tier time and feel excited to work with her.

In addition, Lori observes students during core math instruction to plan thoughtful, targeted support for when they meet with her. Her consistency and care help students grow and feel supported in their learning. Lori's presence in the hallways, her willingness to assist staff and her positive attitude make her a go-to support at Tanglewood. Amy Steadman, Tanglewood Principal, shared, "Lori is a fun individual who demonstrates high patience and a love for supporting student academic achievement."

Impressive fact: From the end of 2024 to the end of 2025, Tanglewood's End-of-Year math scores increased by 10%. This increase comes from the efforts of all staff, including Lori's incredible work as a Math Paraprofessional. Lori's passion, preparation and joyful spirit truly make a difference in the lives of students and the Tanglewood community each day.

This month's volunteer I Make A Difference Award winners are the team at Woodlawn United Methodist Thrift Shop, volunteers who serve Derby Public Schools and the Derby community. Present to accept the award on behalf of the entire thrift shop were Pastor Kim Dickerson-Oard, Board Members Sharon Price (Co-chair), Susan Newman (Co-chair), Marcia Robbins, LeRoy Burgess, Emma Atherly, Pat Allison and Cookie Treffer, along with two highly involved volunteers, Ginger Blake and Carol Boyce.

The Woodlawn United Methodist Thrift Shop has a team of over 80 volunteers and seven board members who provide steady support to students and families across our district and community. For years, they have met the need for clothes, shoes and essential supplies with compassion, care and incredible timeliness.

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Derby Public Schools strives to create a safe and inclusive culture and a comprehensive educational experience that propels students toward their fullest potential so they can positively impact their community.

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Whether it's providing baby items to teen mothers, helping families who have lost belongings due to fires and natural disasters, or supporting vulnerable students who need extra care, the thrift shop staff consistently show up with compassion and purpose. When a need is identified, they respond quickly and take the time to personalize the items they provide. The care they put into preparing items helps students and families feel seen, supported and valued.

Tonia Stoehr, Derby High School Social Worker, shared, "The staff and mission of the thrift shop have provided support to the district Social Workers to help remove barriers and obstacles that keep kids from accessing their education and being successful in school." The team's partnership with the district has been a vital resource to not only fill a gap, but provide support with a high level of care. One example of this commitment is Ginger Blake, who shops for and delivers needed items directly to our schools.

A highly appreciated aspect of the service that the thrift shop staff provides is the time and thoughtfulness they put into each request. When a specific item is not currently available in the shop, the volunteers often go out and purchase it themselves to ensure no student goes without. The proceeds of the thrift shop, made possible by community purchases and donations, go towards purchasing new clothing and shoes for students in need.

Additional support is provided to students through annual financial contributions to Operation Backpack, which supplies school materials, and Operation Holiday, a toiletry drive that benefits students at Oaklawn Elementary. The thrift shop also makes monthly contributions to Derby Community Family Services to help provide food and assist with utility expenses for Derby families. The team's dedication, generosity and quiet strength have touched the lives of so many, and their impact continues to ripple through our schools and community.



Pictured: (Pictured left to right) Lori Rorabaugh, Woodlawn UM Thrift Shop Members Sharon Price, Ginger Blake, LeRoy Burgess and Susan Newman.

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