



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2026

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Derby Public Schools I Make A Difference Award Winners Announced at Board of Education Meeting on February 23

Fay Gutierrez, staff, and Amber Ray and David Young, volunteers, are the February recipients of the I Make A Difference Award.

This month's Staff I Make A Difference Award winner is Fay Gutierrez, Evening Custodian at Oaklawn Elementary. Fay is a shining example of how the work that happens behind the scenes can have a powerful and lasting impact. Since joining the district in 2018, she has taken great pride in caring for Oaklawn Elementary, helping the building earn the Clean Sweep Award and receive positive reviews. Her commitment to excellence ensures that students and staff walk into a clean, welcoming environment each and every day.

While her custodial work is exceptional, what truly sets Fay apart is the heart and creativity she pours into her school community. Balancing school, a second job and motherhood, she still finds time to generously share her artistic talents with students and staff. Throughout the year, Fay surprises the building with imaginative and beautifully crafted displays that transform the hallways into fun experiences. From welcoming students back to school, to designing an autumn tree complete with Thanksgiving touches, to creating festive winter displays, interactive math lessons and vibrant spring decorations, her work brings joy and creativity into the school.

Her latest project, a stunning Winter Wonderland, can be seen by families during drop-off and pick-up and has quickly become a highlight for students, staff and visitors alike. These thoughtful surprises lift spirits, spark wonder and strengthen the positive culture within the building.

Fay's creative contributions, dedication and generosity help create a climate where students feel excited to learn and staff feel appreciated and inspired. She reminds us that every role in our district plays a vital part in connecting with our students and shaping their experience.

This month's volunteer I Make A Difference Award winners are Amber Ray and David Young, community partners for Project LIFE at DTEC. Amber, the manager at Jimmy's Egg, is an outstanding partner and mentor for Project LIFE interns. She goes above and beyond to create a welcoming, inclusive and supportive work environment where interns feel valued and empowered from day one. Through thoughtful planning and genuine care, Amber ensures each student has the tools they need to succeed.

One of the ways Amber makes a lasting impact is by developing individualized daily checklists tailored to each intern. These tools promote independence, build confidence and reinforce accountability in the workplace. By

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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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clearly outlining expectations and celebrating progress, she helps interns gain real-world employability skills and experience success as contributing team members. Her mentorship not only prepares students for future employment but also helps them see themselves as capable, valued employees.

David, Grocery Lead at Dillons Marketplace, is an equally exceptional community partner for Project LIFE. He brings energy, patience and authentic enthusiasm to his work with interns of all ability levels. From the moment they arrive, David intentionally welcomes interns onto his team and teaches them what it means to be a dependable, contributing employee.

David skillfully plays to each student's strengths while never limiting their potential. He utilizes strong visual supports, such as setting up end caps in advance, so that interns can have a clear reference of what needs to be accomplished and independently follow expectations. He always has meaningful work prepared and ensures students remain engaged and productive throughout their shifts. Most importantly, David makes every intern feel appreciated as a true member of the team.

Together, Amber and David exemplify excellence in mentorship, inclusion and community partnership. Their dedication is preparing our students for bright futures and strengthening the connection between Project LIFE and our local businesses.



Pictured: (Pictured left to right) David Young and Amber Ray.

Not Pictured: Fay Gutierrez.

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