

Local Schools



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PB R-I Food Service Director Receives Homegrown Hero Award

MAY 06TH 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff Food Service Director Dixie Harden has been selected as one of three bi-state recipients of the Homegrown Hero award, sponsored by the St. Louis District Dairy Council.

Harden, who is employed by Chartwells School Dining Services, ascended out of 21 finalists from Missouri and Illinois as a grand prize winner for striving to improve the lives of others every day in her community, according to an SLDDC press release issued this month.

“Each year, we are amazed by the heroes nominated, and the work they do right here in our own backyard,” stated Kelsey Hulcher, SLDDC nutrition educator. “It’s wonderful to learn about school cafeteria workers, teachers, custodians and volunteers who creatively and tirelessly work to make their communities a better place.”

Having taken the helm in 2016, Harden has increased breakfast participation and catering services, reduced waste across campus, received kitchen equipment grant funds, assisted with Community Eligibility Program efforts to provide free meals to younger students, and implemented well over a dozen new programs and services at school sites, according to nominator Trish Wilson, Chartwells administrative assistant.

Enhancements to the district’s food service operation Wilson cited include: introducing smoothies, coffee, deli options, on-the-go carts and teacher snack bars, plus providing second chance breakfasts, a dinner option, oversight of Boys and Girls Club dining services, Mule Pack distribution, and expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program as well as the district’s free Summer Food Service Program.

“Within no time Chartwells exploded under Dixie’s leadership,” wrote Wilson, adding that Harden quickly became acquainted with each employee to assess their strengths. “Dixie’s number one priority is feeding her kids nutritional meals.

Established in 2018, Homegrown Heroes is a school-based initiative of SLDDC aimed to promote the local dairy industry in the region. Poplar Bluff R-I was one of two districts in the country to partner with the National Dairy Council and Prairie Farms Dairy to participate in a bulk milk dispenser pilot program two years ago.

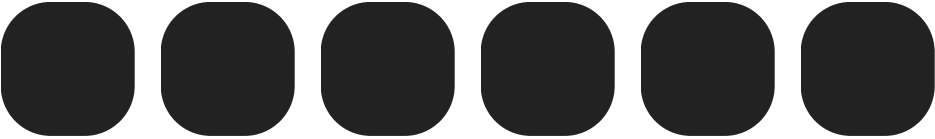
Kelsey Hulcher (right) of the St. Louis District Dairy Council presents Chartwells Food Service Director Dixie Harden with the Homegrown Hero grand prize on Wednesday, April 13.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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