

## Features



[TOP](#)

# Dexter Chamber 2023 Citizen of the Year - Ashley Miller

MARCH 22ND 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

## Dexter Chamber 2023 Citizen of the Year - Ashley Miller

The Dexter Chamber of Commerce held their annual awards banquet on Friday, March 22, 2024. Since the Chamber began 80 years ago, the theme was the 1980s. Members dressed in their best 80s themed clothing and the Elks Lodge was decorated in 80s theme!

Lisa Baker, Chamber Director presented Citizen of the Year.

The Citizen of the Year award is not merely a recognition of an individual's accomplishments, but a jubilation of the profound impact one person can wield on a community.

This year's recipient exemplifies the values of dedication, compassion, and service to others that form the very essence of our town.

Through unyielding efforts and an unwavering commitment, Ashley Miller has left a deep-seeded mark on the lives of numerous individuals, creating a lasting positive change in our community.

Her actions consistently go above and beyond, demonstrating a willingness to do whatever it takes to ensure the well-being of our area. With an ever-watchful eye, she seeks out where she is needed and dives in to offer assistance.

In her role as the owner and operator of Jacksons Florist & Gifts, Ashley has been a beacon of light during families' darkest days and a source of additional joy during

celebratory occasions, such as weddings and school dances.

Her legacy is destined to transcend generations, particularly through her son, Levi, who has begun to contribute alongside his mother.

Since 2010, Ashley has played a pivotal role in the Historic Downtown Dexter Association, faithfully serving as its President for the past six years.

Her volunteerism spans countless hours dedicated to long-standing community events like Fall Fest, Moonlight Madness, and The Christmas Tree Lighting. These events aim to draw people to our community and encourage residents to support local businesses.

In honoring Ashley today, we also pay tribute to the spirit of community that unites us.

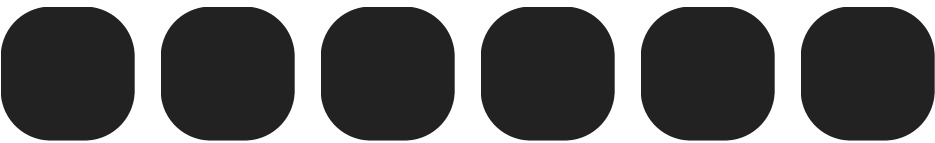
It serves as a moving reminder that each of us possesses the power to shape the world around us.

It is with profound honor that I present the 2023 Citizen of the Year award to none other than Ashley Miller.

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# Dexter Chamber 2023 Educator of the Year - Jessica Jinkerson

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Michael Scism, Chamber Director presented Educator of the Year.

To quote John C. Maxwell, "Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

The genuine care that our 2023 Educator of the Year, Mrs. Jessica Jinkerson, holds for the students of T.S. Hill Middle School is no secret.

Through innovative teaching methods, she breathes life into history within the classroom. Utilizing storytelling and costumes, she transforms what can be a dry subject into an engaging and immersive experience for her students.

Even at a young age, Jessica was innovative in the way she would teach the next generation, such as using a Raggedy Ann Chalkboard to educate her younger sister on the beauty of cursive handwriting.

Jessica Jinkerson first began teaching in the Dexter School District in 2009. She has now entered her eleventh-year teaching American History at T.S. Hill Middle School.

In her classroom, Jessica can transform her students' minds from just learning about the people of hundreds of years ago, to making it exciting and relevant to our lives today.

If you ever get the chance to enter the middle school halls, it is evident the adoration she has for her students is reciprocated. When a current student was asked their thoughts on Mrs. Jinkerson, Raegan said, "Mrs. Jinkerson makes us all excited to

come to school! She's hilarious and makes the classroom come alive."

Jessica stands as a model of remarkable dedication and excellence in supporting her colleagues at every turn. Whether assisting with lesson planning, sharing innovative teaching strategies, or providing emotional support during challenging times, she consistently goes above and beyond. Her generosity in sharing resources and expertise has not only elevated the teaching practices of her colleagues but has also contributed to the overall success of the school.

Mrs. Jinkerson's commitment extends well beyond regular school hours – it's a familiar sight to see her at games, concerts, and various school events after hours. Jessica consistently demonstrates unwavering support and encouragement for her students' diverse interests.

As the director of the esteemed eighth-grade play, she meticulously orchestrates the entire project, infusing it with a perfect blend of passion and precision. Her efforts instill confidence, teamwork, and a genuine love for the arts in her students.

To quote Mrs. Jessica Jinkerson herself, her favorite aspect of teaching is "inspiring students to be lifelong learners and to encourage active participation within the community."

Jessica Jinkerson is more than an exceptional educator; she's a force whose impact transcends the confines of the school walls. Dexter is undoubtedly fortunate to have such an incredible educator in our midst.

With great honor, I present the 2023 Educator of the Year award to Mrs. Jessica Jinkerson.

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## Dexter Chamber 2023 Business of the Year - Bootheel Pediatric Therapy

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Brock Williams, Board Vice President presented Business of the Year award.

According to Bethany Hamilton, motivational speaker, “Courage doesn’t mean you don’t get afraid. Courage means you don’t let fear stop you.”

Cast your mind back to the year 2008, a pivotal moment for Ben and Belinda Worley, as they received the life-changing diagnosis of Autism for their daughter, Emma.

At the outset of this challenging journey, the Worley family faithfully traveled an hour, three times a week, for therapy.

Yet, it soon became evident to Belinda that their family was not alone in seeking a local therapy solution.

With unwavering courage in 2009, a haven for parents and children alike was born.

Enter Bootheel Pediatric Therapy, a sanctuary established to support families navigating the intricate paths of their child's development. Belinda Worley, the visionary behind Bootheel Pediatric Therapy, has been an advocate for children's speech and language development for an impressive 21 years.

Operating within a clinic-based setting, she extends her expertise to children with various developmental delays.

Through a combination of guided practices, play, and engaging exercises, Belinda empowers each child to discover their unique voice in their own time.

Bootheel Pediatric Therapy not only offers Speech and Language Service, but Belinda has also formed Autism Rocks, where she travels all over the country educating and advocating for those with autism.

In 2021, Belinda became a published author with the release of “An Autism Journey of Hope”, a novel dedicated to being a resource to understanding, acceptance, and strength for those navigating the world of autism.

While Bootheel Pediatric Therapy may seem like a one-woman show, Belinda has profoundly impacted the lives of hundreds of individuals.

She humbly contends that those who have touched her life are the true superheroes.

This entire journey commenced with an extraordinary little girl and her remarkable parents.

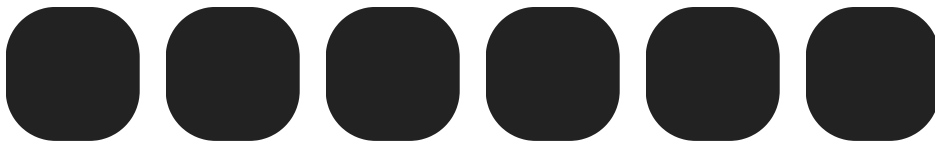
Thanks to the presence of Ms. Emma, our entire community has been enriched by the invaluable contributions of Bootheel Pediatric Therapy and the Worley family.

It is a privilege and an honor to bestow the 2023 Business of the Year award upon Bootheel Pediatric Therapy.

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[Go to post](#)



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[TOP](#)

## Dexter Chamber 2023 Industry of the Year - Republic Services

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Since its establishment in 1993, Lemons Landfill, a subsidiary of Republic Services, has proven to be an outstanding neighbor not just to the City of Dexter but to the entire Stoddard County community.

With a daily collection and processing capacity of approximately 850 tons of trash from the area, the facility has played a pivotal role in waste management.

Beyond waste disposal, Lemons Landfill contributes to the community's economic growth. A portion of the funds generated from each ton of disposed trash is channeled to the Industrial Development Authority of Stoddard County.

These funds, in turn, support initiatives aimed at fostering economic development within the eight member communities of Stoddard County.

Republic Services is currently engaged in a noteworthy collaboration with Archaea Energy. Together, they are in the process of constructing an onsite facility to convert methane gas to natural gas. The resulting natural gas will be distributed via pipeline across the country, providing an eco-friendly energy source capable of heating around 3,000 homes naturally.

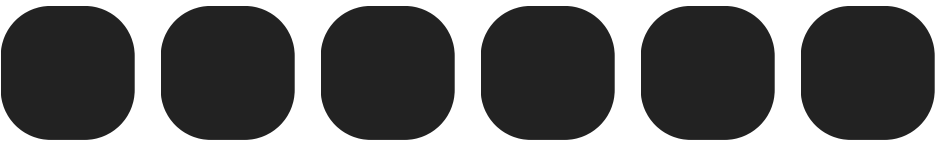
Republic Services stands as an integral part of our community, and Stoddard County is fortunate to have them as a dedicated partner. It is with great honor that we extend our congratulations to

Republic Services as the 2023 Industry of the Year.

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# Dexter Chamber 2023 Organization of the Year - Dexter Friends of the Park

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# Kim Williams, Chamber Director presented Organization of the Year.

In 2016, the seeds of change were sown by a retired special education teacher named Vicki Windham and two other retired special education teachers.

Their vision took root when they approached the Dexter Parks and Recreation board with a heartfelt request – playground equipment designed specifically for individuals with physical handicaps.

At that time, those facing mobility challenges found themselves excluded from public parks due to their wheelchair disabilities. However, the stars aligned, for unbeknownst to them, the Dexter Parks and Rec Department had already embarked on a mission to create universal playground equipment.

The convergence of these efforts led to the establishment of the Dexter Friends of the Park in April 2017.

This dedicated organization convened to address the pressing need for playground equipment catering to individuals with physical handicaps.

Extensive research revealed that over 700 students in Stoddard County Schools were disabled, underscoring the urgency for change. And so, the Boon Park Universal Playground was conceived.

The Dexter Friends of the Park set an ambitious goal – to create a playground that not only caters to all abilities but also fosters social, physical, emotional, cognitive, and sensory development. Their mission was clear: inclusivity for all.

Recognizing the vital role a universal playground plays in promoting community unity, social interaction, and physical well-being, the Dexter Friends of the Park became a driving force behind this transformative initiative.

This visionary organization, now comprising over 20 dedicated committee members, persevered in making the Boon Park Universal Playground a reality.

Since 2016, they organized more than 40 fundraisers, coupled with generous donations, raising an impressive sum of over \$160,000. Their commitment was further fortified by a grant from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources Land and Water Conservation Fund.

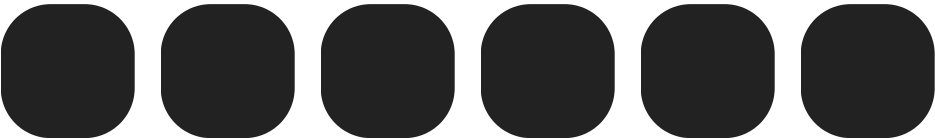
Finally, on November 1, 2023, the community officially celebrated the grand opening of the much-anticipated Boon Park Universal Playground.

Today, we stand here not just to acknowledge their accomplishments but to honor the Dexter Friends of the Park as the well-deserved 2023 Organization of the Year.

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