



NEWS RELEASE

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Berrien RESA Recognizes 2020 Partnership in Education Award Winners

BERRIEN SPRINGS - For the 11th consecutive year, Berrien Regional Education Service Agency (Berrien RESA) recognized a select group of community organizations as Berrien RESA *Partners in Education* for their longstanding commitment to fostering relationships that encourage student development and achievement.

To commemorate their status into this elite group of awardees, Berrien RESA typically hosts a reception in their honor, however, the COVID-19 pandemic redefined what the celebration looked like this year. Instead of an awards breakfast, winners were celebrated with special gift boxes that included a plaque and commemorative thank you note. To ensure a contactless presentation, the boxes were either left at front doors or at service counters to be opened by the winners at their convenience. The awardees then took videos of themselves opening up their package to share with Berrien RESA and the community. The award video can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=363G-BQ7CWY>

This year's *Partners in Education* include:

- Harding's Friendly Market, Berrien Springs
- Pizza Hut, St. Joseph
- Rural King, Niles
- Benton Township Housing Commission,

Partners were nominated by Berrien RESA staff.

"Rural King has partnered with Blossomland Learning Center's Niles offsite program for the past 6 years," said Delynn Williams, teacher for Blossomland Learning Center's Niles offsite program. "Students started in the consumables department and quickly moved to working throughout the store. Rural King has already hired two of our students and is always open to hiring more."

Harding's Friendly Market in Berrien Springs was nominated by Sarah Klee, also a teacher at Blossomland Learning Center.

"Harding's is amazing with our students when we do our weekly shopping trips there," said Mrs. Klee. "They help answer the student's questions, provide great customer service and allow our students to practice job skills like bagging our groceries. The employees are friendly, patient and we look forward to seeing them."

Cheryl Lattak, teacher for the St. Joseph offsite program, nominated Abbi Gnatz, Manager at Pizza Hut in St. Joseph.

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“Abbi has always welcomed our students and has been patient while working with them,” said Mrs. Lattak. “She has hired students from our classroom and the Project SEARCH program. Abbi has been flexible and has embraced new opportunities to serve our students. She has worked with the St. Joseph offsite [classroom] since at least 2005.”

Demarra Drake at the Benton Township Housing Commission was nominated by Patrick Conley, Supervisor of Birth to Three Services at Berrien RESA, thanks to the help she provided in finding usable space for the Early Childhood Education Department.

“Ms. Drake has been fantastic and responsive at meeting our needs as renters of space at the Sammie Smith Family Investment Center,” said Mr. Conley. “Whenever a request or need arises, she responds as quickly as possible and has someone on site for us right away.”

In addition to the plaques, each of the winners’ names will be engraved on a perpetual Partnership Tree sculpture that can be seen in the Berrien RESA Administrative Conference Center.

“This is our special way of saying thank you for all that these entities do to support education throughout Berrien County,” said Berrien RESA Superintendent Eric Hoppstock. “These businesses have gone above and beyond to ensure that students, staff, parents and families have access to numerous educational opportunities. We are truly grateful.”

Berrien RESA congratulates all the 2020 Partners in Education and looks forward to many more opportunities to work together to support the needs of the education community.

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