

The BASIC Initiative Recognizes 2021 Citizens Of Character Awardees

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BELLEVILLE — The BASIC (Belleville Achieves Strength in Character) Initiative proudly recognized eleven community members with the 2021 Citizens of Character Award at a special presentation on November 4, 2021. This was the thirteenth year the awards have been given out.

“The winners of the Citizens of Character award make a positive difference in our community and enhance the quality of life in Belleville. We appreciate their ongoing efforts to make our city and region a great place to live and work,” said The BASIC Initiative board member and Belleville Township High School District #201 Assistant Superintendent Melissa Taylor, who also emceed the awards ceremony.

The Belleville Citizens of Character Awardees for 2021 are:

Sonja Durham, Downtown YMCA

Mark Eckert, former Mayor of Belleville

Austin Frazier, Althoff Catholic High School

Wayne Guetterman, District #201

Mary Karban, community volunteer and former educator

Katie Lundy, non-profit leader

Kathy Mordini, Belleville Mural Project founder

Lisa Quandt, Belleville West High School

Michelle Seneczyn, Belleville East High School

Joe Voss, St. Teresa's School

Ben Winner, Chik-Fil-A Greenmount Commons

The BASIC Initiative Youth Board assisted with the individual award presentation and decorations for the evening, and Belleville District #118 Jazz Band performed.

Nomination summary for winners:



Sonja Durham – Sonja exemplifies the word “respect.” Not only does she give respect to everyone that she meets, she inspires individuals to want to give the same to her. She is often working at the downtown Belleville YMCA and she brightens everyone’s day with her huge smile, even through a mask. Although she has faced obstacles in her life,

she does not let them keep her from striving to do her very best each day. Her amazing personality and dedication to all that she does make her worthy of recognition. People who are fortunate enough to know Sonja are certainly made better because she is in their lives.



Mark Eckert – A proud civil servant for over 24 years, Mark Eckert, through his extensive career as an Alderman and then as Mayor, has always found ways to transform his love and passion for Belleville into service. He is the first in line to volunteer, the loudest voice for those in need, and a steadfast, reliable leader. To residents, Mark is a friendly face in local restaurants, a fixture at local events and festivals, and a strong advocate for the best that Belleville has to offer. His philanthropic spirit is evident through the many roles he has filled and, although he has received countless awards for his service, we are proud to recognize him as a Citizen of Character.



Austin Frazier – A lifelong resident of Belleville, Austin is an educator and coach at Althoff Catholic High School. He is dedicated to his students in the classroom and in life. Austin exemplifies integrity by speaking openly on matters of faith, virtue, and values to his students. As a football coach, Austin develop his athletes to be more than just a team, but also a family; supporting each other on and off the field. Austin makes a difference in the lives of our community’s young people, always encouraging them to develop in their character. He is an unsung hero whose commitment makes Belleville a better place to learn and grow.



Wayne Guetterman – When it comes to doing the work and not wanting the credit, there is no better example than Wayne. His knowledge of facilities and operations in District #201 allows our schools to remain open and safe for students and staff as we navigate COVID-19. He maintains the bus fleet, makes sure building projects are completed properly, acquires PPE and needed equipment, and helps everyone, in every way that he can. These days, you might even find Wayne driving a bus. While he is

most comfortable behind the scenes, he is worthy of recognition for his dedication and caring to our community.



Mary Karban – A lifelong educator in both the public and parochial schools in Belleville, Mary has influenced countless lives through her dedication and care. Kindergarten and first grade students transformed into readers and good citizens under Mary’s watchful eye. She also trained and mentored new teachers through her work with SIUE and with student teachers. After retiring, Mary continued to volunteer in classrooms. Forever a teacher, Mary leads an early morning boot camp twice a week. She is a volunteer at Catholic Urban Program and has been a volunteer at Art on the Square for many years. Mary continues to give of her time and talent and Belleville, and its residents are better because of her influence.



Katie Lundy – It is hard to pick just one positive character trait to describe Katie. She exemplifies what it means to be a strong, well-rounded member of the Belleville community. After being diagnosed at age 11 with a non-operable brain tumor, Katie wanted to make a difference in the lives of children she had met. She started the Katie Lundy Foundation Golf tournament that has raised over \$125,000 through 13 tournaments. Katie is always willing to lend a helping hand to young people in our community and is a strong believer in fair and equitable opportunities. Despite starting her career and attending graduate school, Katie continues to look for ways to be involved and improve our community.



Kathy Mordini – Kathy is an example of hard work and dedication to building a strong community. For the last several years, she has worked tirelessly to develop the Belleville Mural Project. She cares for the future of our town by encouraging young adults to assume leadership roles in her many projects and see the beauty in our community. From planning or volunteering in downtown events to being on committees to help improve the future of our businesses and community, you'll find Kathy involved if it has to do with supporting and bettering our town. Kathy's efforts help people realize that Belleville is a fantastic place to live and work.



Lisa Quandt – Inspired by dedicated educators before her, Lisa’s commitment and devotion to Belleville West High School is unparalleled. She has dedicated her career to teaching special education classes at Belleville West, sponsoring clubs, coaching sports, organizing proms and homecomings, and working behind the scenes on countless special events. She does all that she can to help her city as well. Through ideas like Spirit the City and her work with the BASIC Youth Board, Lisa is a champion for our community and its young people. She knows that together we can achieve more and knows no ceiling for our potential or her own service to others.



Michelle Seneczyn – Michelle is a school counselor at Belleville East High School and started the Make A Change program at the school in 2005. Its mission is to support underprivileged students by raising funds for needed school items as well as assisting with Christmas gifts for the students and their families. Michelle has grown the program from one that supported two students with a \$500 budget to one that supports 30 students each year with approximately \$10,000 in donations. Michelle has “the biggest” heart and continually goes above and beyond to assist the students and families in our community.



Joe Voss – Joe has spent over 30 years as a dedicated leader in youth sports in our community. With a volunteer spirit, he has coached basketball teams from St. Mary’s and St. Teresa Schools in Belleville. He shows integrity, cooperation, and great citizenship in offering his time and talent to our youth. Joe currently serves as the athletic director at St. Teresa, dedicating his time to all of their athletic programs. Coaches can come and go, but Joe has been a pillar in our community for over three decades and has made an impact on countless lives over his years of service.



Ben Winner - As the owner of Chick-Fil-A -Greenmount Commons, Ben embraces not only the CFA family, but the Belleville community as well. He works with our local high schools sponsoring a program called the Chick-Fil-A Leader Academy. He meets multiple times a year with the BASIC Youth Board to talk about service leadership and having integrity in all you do. He is transparent and respectful in how he listens and answers questions for each student asking about his career choice. When hiring students at his location, he is flexible with their schedules to help them have a job but be a high school student at the same time.

Visit www.BASICbelleville.org to learn more about The BASIC Initiative which focuses on building a community of character by offering a variety of opportunities for people to raise the quality of their life by helping to raise the quality of life for others.