



2024 Women of Distinction: Juanita Shaw is "Kid Magnet," Supports Students

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
March 21 2024 1:39 PM



ALTON - As the youngest of seven kids, Juanita Shaw always wanted to help. Now, she's helping her community as a teacher, program director and self-described "kid magnet." Shaw, one of the YWCA's ten 2024 Women of Distinction, will be honored at the Y's annual gala for her commitment to the community. She explained that she enjoys organizing food drives, fundraising and helping community members, and she is excited to be honored alongside other like-minded women.

“Alton is family,” she said. “You have to be there for one another. Doing the work in the community is so important. So I just want to continue doing that and show that to everyone else.”

Shaw currently teaches sixth grade in the Riverview Gardens School District, where she was honored as the district’s Teacher of the Year in 2023. She likes to remind her students that they are “family” to her, and they are always welcome to come to her if they need anything, even after they leave her class.

Shaw has a fun tradition with her students. During the summer months, she sets up an Instagram account and posts coordinates and maps for the students to decode, and then she travels there on her motorcycle. The game helps students learn geography while showing them the beauty of the U.S., Shaw explained. Most recently, she surprised students by traveling to Mount Rushmore after they learned about the landmark.

These travels are also personally fulfilling, as Shaw has wanted to ride motorcycles since she was a child. She said that her experience demonstrates to students that they can do anything.

“I had some really good teachers that really meant a lot to me,” she said. “Anything I achieve, I tell those young people the same thing. You can do anything that you set your mind to. Keep to your goals. Whatever you want to do, make it happen.”

In addition to her 23-year teaching career, Shaw also oversees a program called Teens to Kings and Queens, which empowers young people and encourages them to give back to the community. For anyone who wants to get involved but isn’t sure where to start, she suggests that they choose one cause and start there. She suspects it will be difficult to stop once you begin.

“It’s just like when you’re getting ready to go swimming and you know the water’s cold. You just got to get in and just jump on in there,” she explained. “Find one particular thing and go and do that and, I’m telling you, it’s just going to spread like wildfire. You’re going to want to do more each time you do a community service project. It’s just fulfilling for me. It’s like my big family and I’m just doing my part. It’s not that I have to. I want to. I love Alton and I love doing it for our community.”

Congratulations to Juanita Shaw on this recognition!

This is the fourth in a series of articles about the ten 2024 Women of Distinction. For more information about the YWCA’s Women of Distinction Gala, visit the [official Facebook event page](#).

