Charles County, MD - Each year, Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) honors outstanding support services personnel in the areas of instructional assistant, building service worker, secretary, information technology, maintenance, central office support and food service. After nominations are received and judged, a person is selected to represent one of seven categories.

This year, Juin Lai, media instructional assistant at Henry E. Lackey High School, was named the outstanding instructional support employee; Veistella Milstead, assistant building service worker and night manager at Milton M. Somers Middle School was named the outstanding building service employee; secretary to the principal of C. Paul Barnhart Elementary School Susan Pond was named the outstanding secretary; Juin Lai, media instructional assistant at Henry E. Lackey was named the outstanding instructional support employee; Veistella Milstead, assistant building service worker and night manager at Milton M. Somers Middle School was named the outstanding building service employee; and Trevor Gillum, a computer analyst, was named the outstanding information technology employee.

Instructional assistant

Lai, a media assistant at Henry E. Lackey High School, has a wealth of knowledge about the library media center and her skill and ability exceed the level of proficiency of her position, according to nomination materials. Lai came to Lackey in 2008 and takes initiative on a variety of tasks including brainstorming ideas for student contests and creating innovative library displays.

“Ms. Lai is, without a doubt, one of the most professional and dedicated employees I have had the honor of working with during my 27-year tenure with Charles County Public Schools,” Kathy Perriello, principal of Lackey, wrote in a nomination letter.

Margaret Donahue, library media specialist, was new to the school in 2015, but continuously assured that she would be fine because Lai would be by her side. “They were so right,” Donahue wrote. “I could not have asked for a more knowledgeable, encouraging, flexible, competent and supportive partner. And she is just that — a partner.”

Lai also has other roles at the school. “As a mentor, she’s second to none,” wrote John Lush, an English and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) teacher. “This is a woman who embodies a strong set of values. More importantly, she demonstrates these values to mold the character of many young men and women while making Lackey a better community for our students and staff.” Students appreciate Lai’s dedication as well. “She is smart, witty, thoughtful and easy to connect with on more than just the base level,” wrote Brandon Edge, a student who works with Lai as a library aide. “Although she may not be a teacher, she still teaches and promotes understanding and learning,” Edge wrote.

Building service worker

Milstead started working as a temporary building service worker for CCPS in 2008. By the following year she landed at Milton M. Somers Middle School and was named assistant building service manager at the school in 2012.

Milstead is described in nomination information as the “go to” person who is helpful to her staff, whether veterans or newcomers. She is lauded for her organizational skills and attention to detail. “Ms. Milstead gives great attention to detail because in a building this size and age, it is attention to detail which gets the job done right and well each day,” wrote Somers Principal Carrie Akins in a nomination letter.

Teachers appreciate Milstead’s service. “Ms. Milstead is quick to drop what she is doing to help me and other members of our school,” wrote Crystal Holm, a sixth-grade math teacher. “This winter I know she was here … making sure the snow was cleared and that the sidewalks and trailer ramps were cleared and safe for our students and staff,” sixth-grade social studies teacher April Thompson wrote. “Ms. Milstead has provided me with unending support that any teacher needs in order to be a successful contributor to the school environment,” wrote Lynn M. Hopkins, a sixth-grade English arts teacher at Somers.

Milstead and her team share the workload and work hard. “With her leadership, we all strive for perfection,” said Doris Hawkins, building service worker, in a nomination letter.

Secretary

Pond started her career with CCPS in 2006 as a temporary instructional assistant at Matthew Henson Middle School before becoming a Life Skills instructional assistant at Theodore G. Davis Middle School. She was the secretary for the special education department at the Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building and has been the secretary to the principal of C. Paul Barnhart Elementary School since 2012.

“She works countless hours going above and beyond the call of duty on a daily basis,” wrote Barnhart Principal Troy Barnes in a nomination letter. “I could not be effective in my role as principal without Susan. Her leadership, work ethic, attitude, attention to detail and expertise are superior.”

Pond sets a good example not only for fellow staff members but students as well. “Her ability to act as a role model for students and other staff is clear,” Nicole Hawkins, Barnhart’s vice principal wrote in a letter. Letters from students back up Hawkins.

“She is such a nice secretary,” wrote fourth-grade student Naomi Kirkpatrick. “One reason she deserves this award is that Ms. Pond stays after hours and helps afterschool activities. I also love her dresses and high heels. She’s so fashionable. If someone gets in trouble, Ms. Pond does not yell.”
Gabriel Chapman, president of the school's Parent Teacher Organization, of which Pond is a strong supporter, said Pond “genuinely cares for the students. ‘Not only is she super in tune with the parents, she has awesome relationships with the students,” Chapman wrote. The treasurer of the PTO, LaChelle Davis, works closely with Pond and sees how she goes “above and beyond the call of duty” for the school and its families. “Susan Pond adds a little touch of magic to all that she does for C. Paul Barnhart,” Davis said. “The school would not be able to function properly without her. She is truly the backbone of Barnhart.”

Information technology
Hired as a computer intern in 2004, Gillum has risen through the ranks to computer analyst III, the most senior computer analyst position. Currently, he oversees the Robert D. Stethem Educational Center, the Lifelong Learning Center, General Smallwood Middle School and Indian Head Elementary School.

“He works hard to keep the technology in all the buildings he supports functioning to enable the staff to create learning opportunities and support the mission of our school system,” Lora Bennett, information technology manager for CCPS, wrote in a nomination letter. “His sensitivity to other viewpoints helps promote an atmosphere of mutual respect. Trevor provides an example for many of the technicians in our department with his open, thoughtful, kind methods of supporting technology in the school system.”

B.J. Devkota, director of technology for CCPS, said Gillum’s positive attitude can make a hard day at work seem fun and interesting. “He always handled even the most adverse situation in a calm and collective manner,” Devkota wrote.

Gillum does get out from behind computers though, as evidenced by Heidi Mickey’s letter of support. Mickey, an orchestra teacher for CCPS, said Gillum is well known to students. “I have fond memories of Mr. Gillum helping to DJ school dances and actively lead dance contests among students,” she wrote.

Maintenance
Estevez is a carpenter with CCPS who can be counted on to get involved in any project regardless of the scope, said Steve Vance, director of maintenance, in a nomination letter. “Mr. Estevez has completed many projects that have improved our facilities,” Vance wrote. “His diligence and attention to detail truly make him a valuable asset to Charles County Public Schools.”

Among his projects, Estevez designed and built a temporary wall to support failing trusses at the maintenance building. He researched a design for an expansion joint that was used to modify the existing design of part of Westlake High School’s roof and he took charge of the construction of new roofing systems of portable classrooms at several schools.

He also can be counted on to pitch in when help is needed. “Although his major role is in the carpentry trade … he is invaluable as a snow plow operator in the winter months,” Laurence Budd, former of the operations center group, wrote in a letter. “His diligence and considerable skills in these areas are to be commended.

Administrators are impressed with his “can do” attitude. “Compassionate, dedicated and high energy individuals are the cornerstone of any top quality educational system,” Benjamin Stoddert Middle School Principal Kenneth Schroeck wrote. “Mr. George Estevez is one such person. His is an outstanding, giving and compassionate individual with whom I have had the pleasure to work with.”

Central office support
Simms has been helping CCPS staff even while a student at La Plata High School. Simms, the pupil data accounting specialist, was a student assistant in La Plata’s guidance system, before he eventually landed at his current job. “When I started teaching at La Plata High School in 1981, George Simms was one of the first students that I met,” Joan Withers, acting director of secondary education, wrote in a nomination letter. “I quickly learned that teachers and counselors alike relied on George’s phenomenal memory and his accurate, detailed work.”

Alicia Jones, supervising school counselor for CCPS, said she works closely with Simms to monitor students’ graduation requirements, course selections and other data. “Looking back over my 28 years in education, I can honestly say he is the most dependable person I have ever worked with,” Jones said in a letter. “Mr. Simms goes above and beyond and he always anticipates data you didn’t know you needed to assist you in making an informed decision.”

Charmaine Young-Waddy, a student services specialist, agrees with Jones. “He has a unique ability to anticipate problems before they occur so that major issues can be averted,” she wrote. “He does so much more for so many people during the course of the day that it’s difficult to list everything.”

Food service
Starting as a food service worker in 2003 at T.C. Martin Elementary School, Sprouse was named food service manager at the school in 2008. Willing to meet with parents and families at open houses and meet-and-greets, Sprouse is always available to answer questions about the school’s breakfast and lunch programs, said Martin Principal Greg Miller in a nomination letter. “Jill is a person person; her infectious smile and laugh always make students feel comfortable, even when they are down,” Miller wrote.

Sprouse is a welcoming face for students. “Jill not only knows every child’s name and face in the building, she can remember things they like to eat,” said Beth Ullmann, a music teacher at Martin.

Sprouse helps ease parents’ worries. She sends home notes letting parents know when their child’s lunch account is nearing its limit to allow moms and dads time to add money to the account before it zeros out. Students appreciate Sprouse too. “She has been one of my best friends since the day I could remember,” fourth grader Mandy Wang wrote in a nomination letter. “She never acted gloomy or somber. She doesn’t teach you things or help you learn skills, but she is there to make your day, which is just as important.”

The awards were established to recognize support personnel who exemplify excellence in their jobs. Classified personnel are essential to the effective and efficient operations of the school system.