

News Release

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Evers names five Friend of Education recipients

MADISON — Four individuals and one organization are the 2015 recipients of State Superintendent Tony Evers' Friend of Education awards. They were chosen for their commitment and support of education in Wisconsin and will be recognized Sept. 17 in Madison.

“Wisconsin’s long commitment to education really shows in this year’s Friends of Education,” Evers said. “Through their volunteer tutoring, outreach, and emphasis on education as a stepping stone to the future, our Friends of Education make valuable contributions to Wisconsin and its children.”

Evers will present his Friend of Education awards to Dr. Henry Gradillas of Ashland, a retired school educator and academic tutor at Ashland High School; Pam Jahnke, farm director and voice of the Wisconsin Farm Report, headquartered in Madison; Dr. Kevin Reilly of Verona, president emeritus of the University of Wisconsin System (2004-2013); Women in Focus Inc. of Madison, an organization dedicated to helping youth of color achieve their academic dreams; and Dang Yang of Eau Claire, whose volunteer efforts and work as the Multicultural Recruitment and Retention Coordinator for the University of Wisconsin-Stout’s School of Education are a force for underrepresented students. Additional information about each recipient follows.

Born in Santa Barbara, Calif., and raised in the barrios of East Los Angeles, **Dr. Henry Gradillas** is a graduate of the district’s Roosevelt High School and the University of California, Davis, where he earned his degree in agronomy. At age 50, Gradillas returned to college and earned a doctorate in education, specializing in secondary curriculum. Gradillas may be best known for his role in the success of Jamie Escalante, the teacher portrayed in the movie, “Stand and Deliver.” However, this is one of many achievements. After retiring as a school administrator, Gradillas and his wife, Gayle, moved to northern Wisconsin where he is an academic tutor and substitute teacher at Ashland High School, advocating for and mentoring many students.

Pam Jahnke is the farm director of the Wisconsin Farm Report, a radio broadcast for and about the state’s food producers. Raised on her family’s dairy farm in northeastern Wisconsin, Jahnke learned the “farm work ethic” first hand. She studied broadcast journalism and broad area agriculture at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Beginning her career in broadcast in 1990, Jahnke has grown her farm broadcast presence from a single station in Madison to the Wisconsin Farm Report with a network of affiliates across the state. Through her news reports, Jahnke connects families and schools to Wisconsin farms and is a tireless supporter of agricultural education and FFA throughout the state. Rick McCoy, general manager of Midwest Family Broadcasting, will accept the award on her behalf.

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Dr. Kevin Reilly is president emeritus of the University of Wisconsin System. The hallmark of his service (2004 to 2013) was advocacy for new ways for Wisconsin students to earn college degrees and innovative approaches to the UW's creation of the jobs and industries of the future. Under his leadership, enrollment grew to 182,000 — an all-time high — and sponsored research continued to expand beyond \$1 billion annually. Both transfer students and the number of degrees awarded rose, and privately donated need-based financial aid increased. One of his final innovations as president was to establish competency-based degree programs, the first of their kind offered by a public university system.

Women in Focus Inc. is a diverse group of women dedicated to helping youth of color in the Madison area achieve their academic dreams. Founded in 1983, the organization has two basic goals: promoting literacy and its importance in academic excellence and supporting efforts that encourage academic excellence and higher education for students. Each year, the organization hosts an annual "I Have a Dream" Scholarship Ball. The ball provides an opportunity to showcase former recipients of the organization's scholarships and for these individuals to share their accomplishments. Since its beginning in 1986, the ball has raised over \$275,000. In April of 2015, Women in Focus awarded 14 scholarships valued at \$2,500 each. Accepting the Friend of Education award will be Kathryn Simmons, Sally Hestad, and Rose Ann Brown.

Dang Yang is the Multicultural Recruitment and Retention Coordinator for the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. His work and volunteer efforts are to support underrepresented students in high school and college as they explore careers in teaching. Yang is the son of Hmong refugees, who came to the United States in 1976, and attributes his success to the role his parents, mentors, and teachers played in his upbringing. He was an active participant in the Department of Public Instruction's Wisconsin Educational Opportunity Program (WEOP). Today, he continues to support students in WEOP through his volunteer and professional efforts. He developed the "TEACH Precollege" program for high school students, chartered a high school future teacher student organization, and founded the statewide "Student Development Conference" for college students.

Presentation of the 2015 Friend of Education awards will be part of the State of Education Address and Recognition Ceremony on Thursday, Sept. 17. The event begins at noon in the Capitol Rotunda.

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2015_86.pdf.