



USD 497 News Release

Julie Boyle, Executive Director of Communications
110 McDonald Drive Lawrence, Kansas 66044
785-330-1662 / jboyle@usd497.org

July 12, 2023

Lawrence Public Schools Honors Lied Center of Kansas Staff as its 2023 Outstanding Citizens

The Lied Center of Kansas has partnered with Lawrence Public Schools since the performing arts center opened on the University of Kansas' west campus three decades ago. Its support benefits all of the district's schools, educators and support staff, and its 10,000 students. Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis presented USD 497's 2023 Outstanding Citizens Awards to Lied Center Executive Director Derek Kwan and members of his staff during Monday's school board meeting.

The Lied Center hosts the district's annual fall staff convocation and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebrations, as well as all-city music concerts, state music festivals, and college and career nights. It has even served as a high school prom venue.

"When our staff and students are on the stage of this world-class performing arts center with the professional lighting, sound, and stage, audience, and event management, the Lied Center team makes us feel like super stars," said Dr. Lewis.

According to Lawrence Schools Foundation Executive Director Dena Johnston, as a founding member of its Lawrence Education Achievement Partners program, the Lied Center has been integral to the growth and expansion of business and community support for student achievement. In January, it will host the eighth districtwide Talent Show for middle and high schoolers, called "Ovation!"

"This has become an annual event that allows the community to come together to celebrate all of the immense talent among Lawrence youth," said Johnston.

Every student, preschool through high school, participates in the Lied's annual free, school-only performances. Students interact with world-class artists. When hip-hop duo Black Violin performed, the high schools reported an increase in students interested in playing violin.

"There is nothing like watching the excitement of a kindergartner or a first grader getting off the bus, walking into the Lied Center, being a part of that enormous auditorium, and their wide eyes and their giggles, because they have never sat in a seat like that or been a part of an experience like that. You have provided that to our students," Denise Johnson told the award recipients.

Johnson, the district's elementary curriculum director, added that once a year, all 400 third graders spend a full day engaging in authentic theatrical opportunities. They learn about drama, dance, movement, magic, juggling, makeup, puppetry, lighting, and sound. The Lied Center's Theatre Arts Day also brings together artists from the Lawrence Arts Center, Theatre Lawrence, and the community to share their talents with students.

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As a learning coach, Lysette DeBoard worked with all elementary music, art, and physical education teachers. She thanked the Lied Center for supporting the professional growth of educators. The center hosts teaching workshops with visiting artists. They have shared storytelling, music, art, and movement skills with district educators.

Ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro taught such a workshop. He gave the teachers tips for writing songs and playing ukulele with their students. Visitors to the Lied Center can see our elementary students’ artwork on display. In celebration of the center’s 25th anniversary, Topeka artist Carol Bradbury worked with educators on a collaborative art experience. They assisted students in painting silks that were photographed and produced to adorn the columns of the Lied Center’s lobby.

“Thank you to everyone at the Lied Center, both past and present, for all you have done with and for our students, our staff, and our families,” said DeBoard, who also was this season’s recipient of the Lied Center’s IMPACT Award for art education.

“Your partnership and leadership have truly touched every aspect of Lawrence Public Schools,” she said.

Dr. Lewis presented district Outstanding Citizen Awards to Kwan, Anthea Scouffas, Shala Stevenson, Amber Nickel, Kate Lorenz, Betsy Ostrander, Kim Spencer, and Danny Bowman. Other Lied Center staff honored, but unable to attend Monday are Heather Ashburn, Scout Brandon, Jake Gillespie, Ann Hause, Andy Hause, Brad Knauss, KC McNeely, and Wade Schuler.

“The Lied Center is here to help. We believe that being a true community partner means that you are doing things not just for your personal benefit. You are doing things for others’ benefit,” Kwan said.

Lawrence Public Schools annually recognizes community partners for outstanding leadership and service to public education with its Outstanding Citizen Awards. The first recipient of this award was Hank Booth during the 1988-1989 school year. An alumnus of the Lawrence High’s Class of 1964, Booth was the voice of Lions Football for 50 years and a member of the Lawrence Lions Alumni Association’s Hall of Honor and the Lawrence Schools Foundation Board of Directors.

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