



# COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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## **Kenosha County's Rhodes receives Hillcrest School's Courage to Care Award**

KENOSHA — Kenosha County Gang Intervention Supervisor Donna Rhodes' work is dedicated to changing the lives of at-risk youth and setting them on the right path for productive adulthoods.

Little did she know that an awards ceremony last week at Hillcrest School would prove to be a celebration of the students' accomplishments, as well as her own.

During the Bridges Program event, Rhodes was honored with Hillcrest's Courage to Care Award — an accolade that caught her by pleasant surprise.

Presenting the award to Rhodes, School Social Worker Melissa Szejna credited Rhodes for putting her heart and soul into her work, while always keeping a smile on her face and an ability to talk with anyone she meets.

“Donna has the ability to take any situation and find solutions and positives to make them teachable moments for all involved,” Szejna said. “Donna's passion and commitment to our students and school is truly a source of inspiration.”

Rhodes was honored along with Jay Beltran, a food services worker at Hillcrest. Szejna said both demonstrated resiliency throughout many changes and challenges throughout the school year.

Hillcrest Principal Eitan Benzaquen said Rhodes has been vital in creating and maintaining a partnership between the nonprofit Community Impact Programs, the county Division of Children and Family Services and the Kenosha Unified School District, in which the agencies work together to ensure student and family success.

“Donna has always put kids first and has dedicated her life to helping kids and families in crisis,” Benzaquen said. “It takes such a strong and dedicated person to not fight or flight when crisis

occurs; instead, she is there through it all, helping everyone. We are so lucky to have Donna working with us.”

Hillcrest is a Kenosha Unified School District school that offers programs for middle and high school students who have experienced difficulties in traditional settings.

As Gang Intervention Supervisor, Rhodes works with local schools and coordinates the county’s long-running Summer Youth Employment Program, which provides paid employment and job skills training to at-risk youth. Rhodes joined Kenosha County in 2009 after 20 years of supervising programs for Professional Services Group, a CIP sister agency.

Rhodes said it is gratifying to her to see students who have had struggles go on to graduate from school and succeed in life.

“I am completely honored and humbled to receive this award, but I know I could not have done it without the staff at Hillcrest, KUSD and CIP, and the staff at DCFS,” Rhodes said. “Hillcrest is an amazing place, and it would not be the same without the support of all of the staff, and I share this Courage to Care Award with all of them. Because we all need the courage to care to help these kids succeed.”

For more information about the Kenosha County Division of Children and Family Services and its various services, please visit <https://www.kenoshacounty.org/241/Children-Family-Services>.

More details about Hillcrest School are available at <https://www.kusd.edu/hillcrest/>.

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