



January 13, 2017

## **Volusia Names Jason Kester Teacher of the Year**

DAYTONA BEACH – Jason Kester, culinary arts teacher from Mainland High School, is Volusia County Schools' Teacher of the Year for 2018. He will serve as Volusia County's Teacher of the Year for one year, representing all of Volusia's teachers.

Mr. Kester received his award before an audience of more than 900 friends of public education at the Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort on Friday, January 13, 2017. The announcement was made at a celebration presented by Halifax Health and co-hosted by FUTURES Foundation and Volusia County Schools.

"The Teacher of the Year event, presented by Halifax Health, is a time for FUTURES and all its partners to celebrate one teacher from every school who has brought something extra special to the table of education and our students," said John Guthrie, FUTURES Foundation President. "The electricity in the room is something I look forward to every year. It is an event that is about one thing...great teachers we are fortunate to have in our county."

Mr. Kester earned his bachelor degree from Purdue University and began his career with Volusia County Schools at Mainland High in 2008. He is the founder and director of the Academy of Hospitality and Culinary Arts at Mainland where he collaborates with two other instructors and facilitates a student management team. As a "branch leader" in Mainland's new wall-to-wall career academy model, he supervises three academies and works in partnership with 25 teachers. In addition, he is a teacher mentor for two first-year faculty members, serves as a teacher leader with a team of nine other teachers, and is a program assistant for the high school culinary program at the county level.

The Mainland High culinary program is one of 21 Premier ProStart programs in the entire state of Florida, as determined by the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association. Culinary students participate in competitions, frequently cater special events and are encouraged to earn the ProStart Certificate of Achievement, which is a CAPE (Career and Professional Education) industry certification. Last year, six of Mr. Kester's students passed the rigorous state certification.

Prior to becoming a teacher, Mr. Kester worked as a restaurant operator and he considers the two jobs very similar. He believes building relationships with students, families, teachers and administrators is a priority and stated in his Teacher of the Year application form that "one positive, professional, adult relationship can make all the difference in a student's future."

Mr. Kester is inspired by his students' dedication, creativity and energy. He believes it is important to remember that failure is a necessary part of the learning process and students shouldn't be punished for failure that results in learning. He states, "In order to grow, one needs to be challenged." Because he sometimes teaches students for two or three years, he can see that growth and, therefore, his ability to affect change.

Described as one who leads by example with courage, integrity and energy, Mr. Kester succeeds Robin Diedrichs, a fourth grade teacher from Citrus Grove Elementary School, who was Volusia County's 2017 Teacher of the Year.

In addition to Mr. Kester, four other teachers received special recognition as finalists:

- Susan Dodig, emotionally/behaviorally disabled (K-3), Sweetwater Elementary
- Jessica L. Ruppen, academic coach, Starke Elementary
- Gina Marie Walker, exceptional student education language arts, DeLand Middle
- Robin Lynch Weiss, speech/language, Champion Elementary

Three teachers were named recipients of an award that represents the school district's three guiding principles. Superintendent Russell presented the awards along with a \$150 check from FUTURES Foundation to:

- Heather Williams, academic coach at Cypress Creek Elementary – Guiding Principle #1, Dedication to Increased Student Achievement. Heather’s inspiration comes from the success of her peers as they work together to improve the way they teach our future. She is passionate about pushing her students to think critically and work collaboratively; and she thrives from sharing knowledge and working collaboratively with other teachers.
- Melanie Jenkins, honors biology and marine science teacher at Deltona High – Guiding Principle #2, Commitment to Finding Solutions to Problems. Melanie serves as the science department chair, a new teacher mentor, the biology Professional Learning Community team leader, and as a sponsor for three student clubs. As a core teacher in the Health Academy program, Melanie works with business partners to support her programs and activities. She also works closely with other teachers to incorporate STEM topics and to develop programs and activities in an interdisciplinary way.
- Lynne Seeber, AVID coordinator and elective teacher at Seabreeze High - Guiding Principle #3, Mutual Respect and Positive Relationships with all Stakeholders. Lynne is determined to deliver the curriculum and teach students to be divergent thinkers and high level questioners, but her truest and most dedicated goal is to love her students. Every Friday, she holds Seeber’s Circle where students share about their lives and greet one another with “hugs, handshakes and high fives.” When her students walk into her classroom, they walk into her heart and they are loved.

Major sponsors of the Teacher of the Year celebration included Presenting Sponsor Halifax Health, Gold Sponsors Florida Credit Union and Volusia United Educators, and Silver Sponsors BRPH Architects – Engineers, Inc., Daytona International Speedway, H.J. High Construction,

Dr. Robert & Candace Lankford, Launch Federal Credit Union, PNC Bank, Rhodes + Brito Architects, SGM Engineering, University of Central Florida, and Weston &

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FUTURES Regent's Club Members who serve as sponsors for all event are Charter Communications/Spectrum, Daytona International Auto Mall, Duke Energy, Florida Health Care Plans, Florida Hospital, and Florida Power & Light while Brown & Brown of Florida, Inc., and Cobb Cole serve as a Chancellor's Club Members for 2016-17.

Leading the in-kind sponsorships is Craig Conway of Diamond Motors & Marine and Daytona Mitsubishi/Kia who provides the use of a new automobile to the Teacher of the Year during his/her reign. This is Mr. Conway's seventh year in supplying a vehicle. Additional in-kind sponsors include Daytona Beach News-Journal, Dean Stewart Photography, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Express Printing, Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort, Jostens Inc., LEGOLAND Florida Resort, Mary's Flower Shoppe, Merlin Entertainments, Nina B. Hollis Institute at Stetson University, Universal Orlando & Blue Man Group, and Wishworks Media.

Dozens of businesses and organizations in Volusia County also contributed donations of goods and services to Volusia's Teacher of the Year program.

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Dropbox link to five finalist photos:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fqin0pchlqxl9y/AADkLd80rG48X3q7tdQpj1V\\_a?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fqin0pchlqxl9y/AADkLd80rG48X3q7tdQpj1V_a?dl=0)

Dropbox link to three guiding principle award winner photos:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/2ad4ljutbeugw3d/AAAcnqx6AodqW4wC25aezOa?dl=0>