

# Goodwill supports special education in area schools

In recognition of leadership in special education, Goodwill Industries of Central Michigan's Heartland, Inc. (GICMH) presented \$2,500 checks for non-discretionary spending to leaders from intermediate school districts in its 10-county service area: Barry,

Branch, Calhoun, Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Hillsdale, Ingham, Jackson and Washtenaw.

In addition, superintendents from four school districts in Battle Creek – where GICMH is headquartered – each received checks for \$2,500, while Doris Klaussen, a trailblazer in the field of special education. As principal at Ann J. Kellogg Elementary School, she saw that vocations were limited for young people with severe disabilities who were leaving the public school system.

After establishing GICMH, she spent 45 years in various roles for the nonprofit, now part of a network of more

Goodwill stated.

The nonprofit concept started in the early 1900s in Boston by Edgar Helms and was brought to the Battle Creek area in 1953 by Doris Klaussen, a trailblazer in the field of special education.

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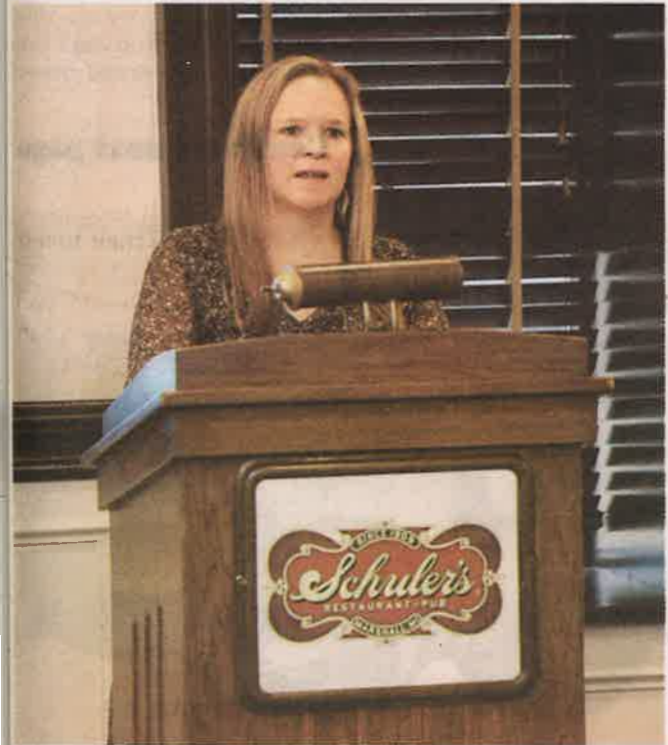
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than 150 Goodwill Industries CEO of GICMH, said the organizations across the U.S., social enterprise wanted to Canada and 12 other countries.

Ken Bauer, president and **Continued next page**



Goodwill honored special education professionals at an October event in Marshall. Pictured is Jessica Clothier, assistant superintendent of the Calhoun Intermediate School District.



Shown here is Stacey Newton, Harper Creek Community Schools special education teacher.

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GOODWILL Continued from previous page

recognize and show its support for special education teachers because it was "the right thing to do."

"Our board understands the work that we do in our communities and how essential it is to have partners like yourselves," Bauer said to those in attendance at the event in Marshall. "In honor of Doris Klaussen, that's why you are here tonight. She really was someone who had a lot of insight as to how to help the most vulnerable people in our community. When she heard about [Goodwill Industries founder] Edgar Helms, she toured the coun-

try visiting Goodwill [locations] to see how applicable it would be in Battle Creek, Mich. So, because of her persistence and her desire to help people who have disabilities, she founded our company in 1953."

Speaking to a room of special education teachers and school administrators, Jessica Clothier asked for a show-of hands for anyone who had taken money out of their own pocket to help a student.

Every educator, in attendance raised a hand.

"The gesture affirmed each teacher's commitment to

their students, as well as the inadequate funding of special education at school districts across Michigan," the press release stated.

"You're all special," Clothier, assistant superintendent of Calhoun Intermediate School District, told the group gathered Oct. 12 at Schuler's Restaurant in Marshall. "The very fact that you chose to challenge yourself and extend your knowledge means there is something within you wanting to unleash and empower the potential within your students and schools. You want and are making an impact



From left, Dr. Preston Hicks, vice president at GICMH; Battle Creek Public Schools Superintendent Kim Carter; and Ken Bauer, president and CEO of GICMH.

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every day."

"It's very humbling and an honor that Goodwill is taking time to recognize the special education world and the needs of our students," said Dr. Sarah Parker, special education director of off-site programs at Eaton Regional Education Service Agency (RESA). "Currently, we have federal dollars, so our budgets are limited on what we can spend. So having some non-discretionary funds that go into a pot. ... that's really meaningful."

In Michigan, about 200,000 students receive special education services, making up nearly 14 percent of all stu-

dents. The Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators estimates a \$343 million special education shortfall for the fiscal year 2023.

Kathy Slee, principal and special education supervisor of Doris Klaussen Developmental Center, accepted the funds on behalf of the school, which is for students ages birth to 26 with moderate to severe physical or mental impairments.

"As a school, we do what we have to do. You can't help a student progress and grow if

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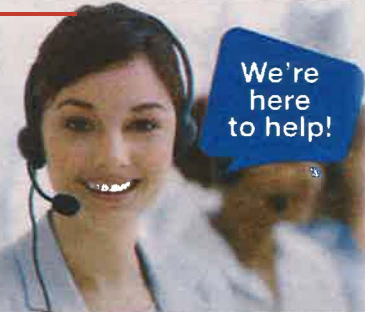
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Pictured are representatives from Lakeview Schools (center, holding the check is Superintendent Dr. William Patterson).



Pennfield Superintendent Stephanie Lemmer; Board of Education President Dawn Forton; and GICMH President and CEO Ken Bauer.

we can't ensure basic needs are met, whether that be food, clothes or whatever the needs may be," Slee said. "To have this gift afforded to us, and be able to think creatively and

systematically how we can best utilize that, we're pretty fortunate."

As part of the recognition ceremony, Harper Creek High School special education teacher Stacey Newton shared her personal experience working in special education for 15 years, as well as the opportunities afforded to her students and family through the Goodwill Connects program.

Goodwill Connects is a youth workforce development program, where students age 16 or older are placed with community partners for a summer of mentor-

ship and work experience.

"I have witnessed students achieve things that exceeded

even their own expectations, proving that with the right support and encouragement, the sky is the limit," Newton said in her remarks. "In a world that often underestimates the capabilities of individuals with disabilities, Goodwill Connects stands as a beacon of hope, providing pathways to meaningful employment. ... Together as educators, parents and advocates, we can continue to create a world where everyone is empowered to contribute to their community and share their unique gifts."

For many students with disabilities, post-graduation employment and independence can be a major challenge.

Newton, the mother of two boys on the autism spectrum, said Goodwill Connects was especially meaningful for her oldest son, who is now a senior at Harper Creek.

"The transformation I've witnessed since he joined is nothing short of remarkable," Newton said. "The pride he

demonstrates when he tells people that he's working is truly amazing. Through this program, he has not only gained practical work experience, but has also developed a profound sense of independence and responsibility."

It is through a network of community partners, such as Charitable Union, that GICMH can help remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities, according to the press release.

And for GICMH, it was important to take a night to recognize and support the nonprofit, as well as the lead-

ership of special education teachers in southcentral Michigan.

Dr. Preston Hicks, vice president of workforce development and community partnerships at GICMH, concluded the ceremony by telling the honorees gathered: "This is tremendously powerful work you do. ... We thank you for it."

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