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BUSINESS

&

CITIZEN  
OF  
THE  
YEAR

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# CITIZEN, BUSINESS OF THE YEAR AWARDS

named after JACKIE WENGERT

By Justin Hotop  
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Jackie Wengert could never technically win the "Republic-Monitor Citizen of the Year" because, for a long time, she was the Executive Director of the Perryville Area Chamber of Commerce. That forever changed. During the presentation of the Perry County Republic-Monitor's Business and Citizen of the Year during the newspaper's ribbon cutting ceremony March 24, Wengert was named an "Honorary Citizen of the Year". Both awards will be named after Wengert going forward.

"She was always going," Perryville Area Chamber of Commerce Operations Manager Renee Lottes said. "She was always doing this or that. It was like she had the energy of a 10-year-old. She loved this community and would do anything to make it a better place."

Wengert passed away suddenly on March 2 after retiring from the Chamber of Commerce the previous June after four years. It wasn't the first time that Wengert stepped away from the position as she was the executive director from 1999-2005. When the position became available again in 2018, and she jumped at the chance to lead the Chamber of Commerce for a second time.

"I loved working for the Chamber," Wengert said before retiring. "To be honest, I was working out of town back then and the work was in a cubicle in an office and I just missed the people. I missed communicating with the businesses and I was at one of those times in my life when I felt like I would love to get back with the Chamber again."

Along with being the director of the Chamber, Wengert submitted Missouri Community Betterment Conferences books each year and attended the MCB in Jefferson City, was the head of the Perryville Mayfest Committee, organized Moonlight Madness on the Square, served on the Perry



County Community Rodeo Committee, organized Shop Local Campaigns, organized many membership meetings, ribbon cuttings, business after hours, coffee and connections and power hours to bring businesses together to network and support one another, along with many other smaller things she did that often went unnoticed.

"She was always helping people," Lottes said. "I think she found true joy in doing that. I don't really know how she found the time to do all the things she did."

That statement was echoed by many who knew her.

"Jackie spent her time at the Chamber always giving back, working hard, and doing whatever it took to make the community shine," reads a post on the official Chamber of Commerce Facebook page. "Jackie believed in giving back to her community and encouraged others to do the same. She enjoyed telling visitors of the office just how amazing our small community was and how Perryville had the best stores, churches, restaurants, historic places, etc. Jackie was a fountain of knowledge when it came to the history of Perry County and had immense pride for our community. She enjoyed working with others to plan events, such as the Mayfest. It brought her joy to bring others joy. There was a lot to be learned from her and she has forever left a stamp on this community as a great servant."

Along with helping the community, Wengert was constantly helping those around her.

"She prayed for so many people over and over", said Lisa Marie Joyce, Wengert's daughter. If you had troubles, you can guarantee my

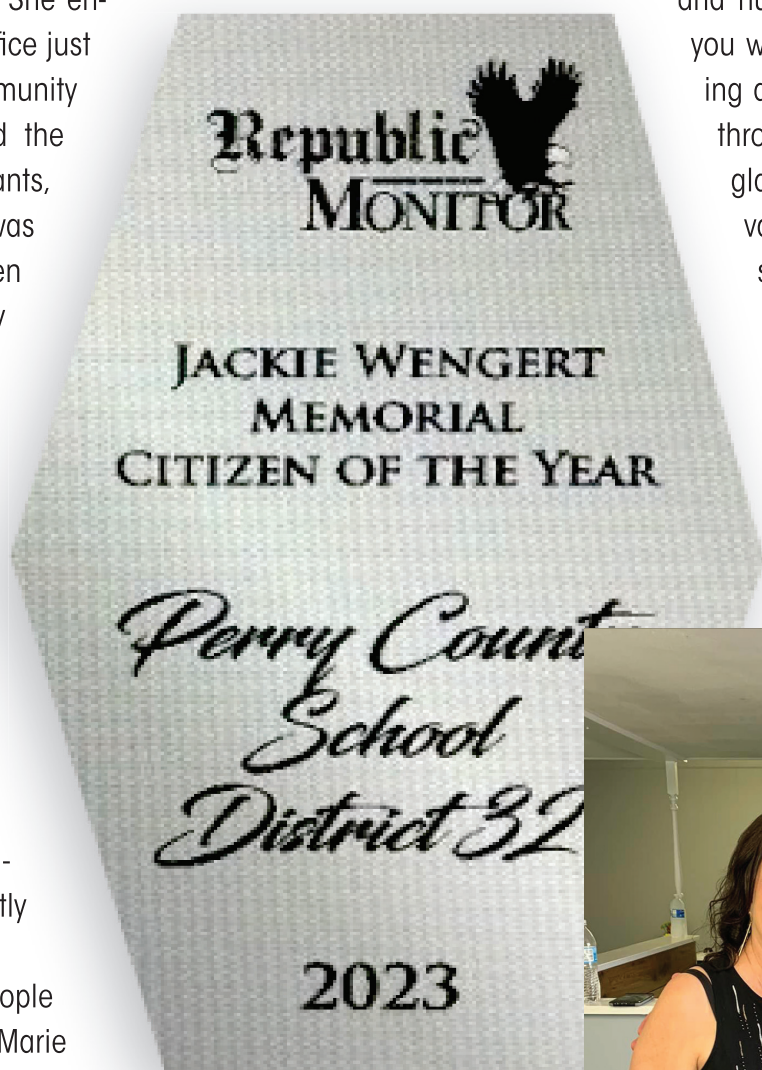
mom prayed for you. She constantly told me whenever I was in despair to give it to God. She would say, 'You don't have to carry this, let him carry it for you.' Well, just look at this room, God, you've got a heavy load."

Joyce described Wengert as a wonderful mother and person.

"If my mom had a part in raising you then you sang Christmas songs all year round instead of lullabies," Joyce said during Wengert's funeral service. "You danced to Elton John playing off the record player. You made greeting cards on a random afternoon. You felt larger than life when you could make her laugh until she almost peed her pants. You collected money at Christmas time to buy presents for a less fortunate family. You knew if you were five minutes late for curfew, your things would be in the front yard and on fire.

"You knew she was married to her soulmate because she kissed and hugged him often and didn't care who watched. You knew you would see mom on the sideline of your sports game wearing a custom shirt with your number on it. You walked with her through every antique mall looking for another piece of Fenton glass. You knew how to go into the flower shop with your own vase and ask for the cheap flowers with carnations. You knew she could whip you up a flower arrangement anytime for anything. You woke up on St. Nick's day knowing Mom has something in your stocking."

Diane Kohm and Perry County School District 32 were named this year's Citizen and Business of the Year and Wengert's values will guide future candidates going forward.



Republic-Monitor/File Photo

**Former Perryville Chamber of Commerce director Jackie Wengert (left), standing with Perry County Commissioner Jay Wengert, was well-known in the community for her efforts in promoting the businesses and citizens of city and the county she served.**



# PERRY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 32

named BUSINESS OF THE YEAR



By Justin Hotop  
jhotop@perryvillenews.com

It's a place that makes the most impact on the most people within Perry County. That's part of the reason that Perry County School District No. 32 was named the Perry County Republic-Monitor's Business of the year during a special ceremony March 24.

"This is a tremendous honor for the district, especially for our students and staff, who put in the hard work every day to be and do their very best," Perry County School District Superintendent Andy Comstock said. "Our Belief Statement, developed by our CSIP Committee, ends with the line 'We believe in grit and grace.' That's reflective of our understanding that we can always, always do better, and we

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DIANE KOHM

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have the grit to do the hard work to get there. It also acknowledges that we must give others and ourselves grace throughout the process of becoming our best.”

District Communication Director Kate Martin said that she knows that a school is not a traditional “business,” but that it still qualifies for such an award.

“District 32 is one of the major employers in our community with over 350 employees,” Martin said. “With a school day population of nearly 3,000 people, including students, teachers, support staff and visitors, the district is as large as a small city in the region. While we don’t manufacture a product or sell a service, our graduates are among the most valuable ‘finished products’ our community sends into the world, in part created by the services we provide in the district. Every profession is represented in our 9,000-plus alumni.”

Part of the reason those statistics ring true for Martin is that the staff and student relationship is strong on campus.

“Anyone who steps foot in our buildings knows that kids are the reason we all love to work at school. Our teachers are continuously working to improve their educational practices,” Comstock said. “All staff members are dedicated to caring for our kids in whatever way the student needs. Some kids just need encouragement, some come to school hungry, some students are experiencing homelessness and need resources to cope with that situation. I am so incredibly proud of the people who work at District 32, because they take the time to learn what each child needs and work together to support that child. We want our students to look forward to school every day!



Republic-Monitor/Justin Hotop

**Perry County School District superintendent Andy Comstock said he’s proud of staff and the effort they put in every day saying, “they take the time to learn what each child needs and work together to support that child.”**

That can be a hard sell with kids today as we are competing with mobile technology for their attention. Our teachers collaborate to create interesting lessons, we invest in programs like STEM and career and technical education that give students the opportunity to experience project-based learning. We offer a robust catalog of extracurricular programs, and award-winning classes in the arts. Those things light that fire for our students.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

*Congratulations*  
**PERRY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT** for being chosen 2023 Jackie Wengert Memorial Business of the Year  
 & **DIANE KOHM** for being named 2023 Jackie Wengert Memorial Citizen of the Year!

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Voters in Perry County approved Prop KIDS in 2017, a measure that gave the district needed funds to build a new Primary Center, renovations at the elementary school and a new middle school that will open its doors in the fall.

While students go to school within the district, they also provide aid to the Perry County community when it's needed. Perry County schools provided hand sanitizer and other medical supplies to Perry County Memorial Hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic. The district also opened a shelter for workers who needed a safe place to stay to avoid spreading COVID-19 to others. Students also ran food drives when supplies were low.


The help doesn't end there as students provide food and pennies for local pantries, the Dress for Charity fundraiser provides thousands of dollars of clothing to needy families. Parents and students partner with teachers to provide aid with daily homework, volunteering in classrooms and events."

Comstock noted that the giving portion would be lost without the 2017 Prop KIDS bond issue that provided the construction of two FEMA storm shelters, the new primary center in 2019, the complete remodel of the Perry County Middle School.

"The support of the community is among the very best motivators that we as a school family have! We have the monetary support provided by our taxpayers when they approved Prop. KIDS in April 2017, which has made possible the new Primary Center, as well as extension renovations at the elementary school, and the new middle school that will open its doors to students this August. Our campus is becoming one that everyone in the community can be proud of.

"Community support also encourages our staff and students to

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# DIANE KOHM



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# DIANE KOHM

named CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

By Justin Hotop

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Diane Kohm was utterly surprised by her nomination, so much so that she could hardly believe herself.

Kohm was recently named the Perry County Republic-Monitor Citizen of the Year and she said thought she was not the only worthy candidate.

"I thought there was no way," Kohm said. "There are so many people that do so much

in the community. It's very heartwarming that there are people in your life that are appreciative of the things you do or even notice. Those same people have to be doing the same things you're doing or they wouldn't notice."

Kohm was named Family Readiness Group Leader and had the chance to work with 129 families while her husband was deployed to Iraq, which probably sparked her enjoyment of volunteering and help the community.

"One of the things about volunteering and

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### DIANE KOHM

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being a part of great organizations in the community are the number of people that you get to know and become friends with, that you wouldn't never have a relationship with if you weren't there doing that stuff. When you volunteer at school or anything like that, those organizations do so much and I'm just there to support them."


Kohm also volunteered when her children were in school as she helped with the band programs and it has blossomed from there.

"When my kids were young, I volunteered a lot with the marching band at school," Kohm said. "Mr. [Bill] Fisher was very appreciative of any help that anyone could give, so I just stepped in. When my kids graduated, people

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Republic-Monitor/Justin Hotop  
**Perry County Republic-Monitor Citizen of the Year Diane Kohm (center) was presented her award during a special award ceremony March 30 at the Republic-Monitor office in Perryville.** "One of the things about volunteering and being a part of great organizations in the community are the number of people you get to know and become friends with," Kohm said.





*Congratulation to the recipients of the 2023*  
**JACKIE WENGERT MEMORIAL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**  
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were like, 'What are you doing to do with you time?' We have grandchildren, so that took a lot of our time."

Kohm found the time in her schedule to volunteer at a lot of different places including the Bethlehem Baptist Church in Cross-town, the Sons of the American Legion, and the American Legion Auxiliary and many more that Kohm couldn't remember. Kohm also helped with the Missouri National Veterans Memorial and its grand opening along with other projects.

There were even some places that Kohm volunteers that she didn't even attend.

"Mike Lundy had put my husband in a position where he was supposed to organize an event and we both worked full-time and

**Republic-Monitor/Justin Hotop**  
**Diane Kohm (left) is presented with the 2023 Jackie Wengert Memorial Citizen of the Year award by Perry County Republic-Monitor publisher Robert Cox during an award ceremony March 24. Joining Kohm at the presentation were her daughter, Michaela Pitts (second from left) and family friend MayKayla Huber.**

**Congratulation to the receptions of the 2023**  
**JACKIE WENGERT MEMORIAL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**  
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Paul wasn't able to attend because he drove a truck. I ended up attending the meetings and I ended up with a job."

For Kohm, she is ready to help out wherever she is needed and will perform any task.

"Paul has been with the fire department for many years and it's about supporting my family and everything they do," Kohm said. "One weekend we are baking for a sale the fire department is having. Whatever spot we are in or whoever needs things, my family is the type that just does things for people when they need it."

Volunteering is something that Kohm still enjoys.

I like talking to all the different kinds of people you would meet at the events and things like that," Kohm said. "There are a lot of great people in this community if a person would take the time to meet and talk with them."

Kohm wants to volunteer in as many places as she can.

"I just feel like that if you have the ability to help out, then you

should," she said. "Back in the day, helping out is something that you just did. I'm also kind of a sucker for things like that because I can never just say no."

Kohm said she will continue to help out as much as she can.

"Most definitely, she said. "Sometimes it can be all consuming and sometimes you feel like you need to back off, but I just can't. In the case of the American Legion or the Auxiliary there is always something that needs to be done. If you have the ability and the time to help out, how can you say no? I certainly can't."





# Thank you!

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