

Welcome back

Coventry schools welcome back staff, honor district's 2017 teacher of the year

By **KENDRA LOLIO**
klolio@ricentral.com

COVENTRY

Teachers, administrators and staff for the Coventry School District celebrated and ushered in the upcoming school year with an "opening day" ceremony at Coventry High School Monday morning for faculty and administrators. Longtime educator Lisa Johansen was recognized as the Coventry Teacher of the Year and Coventry High School Guidance Clerk Barbara Erno was named Support Related Professional (SRP) of the Year. Superintendent Craig Levis also introduced the many new staff members joining the district's schools this year.

Johansen is currently a Coventry High School Social Studies Teacher and has been teaching in the district for 27 years. She worked at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School for eight years in addition to her time at the high school, which started in 1999. In 2012 she was named the Rhode Island History Teacher of the Year by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History and Preserve America. She was also nominated for the National 2012 History Teacher of the Year Award.

"She is a phenomenal educator," said Levis. "She always puts students first. She leads with passion and commitment and her love of social studies."

Erno, another longtime member of the district, is known around the high school for being a source of endless information, according to her colleagues.

"She's considered the glue that holds the guidance department together," said Levis. "She is a resource to everyone in that building and it's an honor to recognize her."

"The guidance office at the high school is one of the most hectic in the country,"

said CHS Principal Mike Hobin. "The phone is ringing constantly, kids are constantly in need of something. Mrs. Erno somehow is able to manage all of those things at one time."

"I would be on stimulus overload and have an OCD meltdown," he joked. "I can't imagine the first award going to anybody else. She's done a tremendous job over the years for our 1,500 students."

Levis, who said he would try to refrain from making an 'everybody deserves a trophy speech,' said that he is truly proud of the work of the entire district and all of the personnel who put students first on a day-to-day basis.

"Unless you do the work we do, unless you truly walk in our shoes, I don't think people understand the responsibility we have," he said.

Levis thanked Coventry School Committee Chair Katherine Patenaude for her ongoing support, as well as Coventry Town Manager Graham Waters for "recognizing the capital needs we have in this community."

"He's been a true partner," Levis said of Waters.

"We've had a lot of changes, but through change comes the opportunity for stability," said Levis. "I've never had a success in my life that wasn't through people and it isn't more evident than while being a superintendent of a community."

George Egan, Chairman of the Coventry Teachers Federal Credit Union Board of Directors and a former Coventry Schools administrator, joked that with all of the new hires being announced the credit union would be "expecting a boost" in their membership. Credit union CEO and Manager Kenneth Wilkins also attended the ceremony.

Egan encouraged those working for the district to considering joining the credit union and added, "I just



Submitted photo

Longtime Coventry High School Social Studies Teacher Lisa Johansen was recognized Monday morning as the Coventry Teacher of the Year.

know things are going to go very well for the teachers, kids and the town of Coventry."

He also noted that Erno, the support related professional of the year, is "deserving of her award."

Levis went on to speak to the faculty about the importance of having purpose and passion in their line of work.

"If we truly don't want to make a difference in kids' lives it's not worth it," he said. "This is more than just a job. I don't see how any of us can do what we do every single day without purpose or passion. The fact that 5,000 plus youth in our community spend most of their waking time with us every single day is a huge responsibility."

He asked everyone to be mindful of the influence they have on students and set a challenge for staff members

this year: to focus on their most challenging students and ask themselves 'what can I do to make a difference in that child's life?'

Finally, given the recent incident involving Providence Public Schools administrators failing to report allegations of sexual abuse of students, Levis emphasized that faculty and staff are required by law to report any information to the state's child abuse hotline. Although he said individuals have 24 hours to report such information, Levis encouraged his staff to do so the same day.

"If you find out something on a Monday, you should report it on a Monday," he said. "We want to protect our children and also our staff."

Follow Kendra Lolio on Twitter @kendralolio

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Students from Hopkins Hill Elementary led the Pledge of Allegiance during the Coventry School Department's 'opening day' ceremony for faculty and staff on Monday.