

LIONS CLUB *greet's new teachers*

84th annual new teacher luncheon connects educators with community

BY JOAN RYKAL | FOR THE BUGLE

Hosting a welcome luncheon for teachers prior to the beginning of a new school year has been a long-standing tradition for the Lions Club of Downers Grove. And this year was no different, as the club hosted its 84th annual event at Gatto's Restaurant in Downers Grove.

More than 40 new teachers from District 58 and District 99 were warmly welcomed during two separate events this month, which included district staff, local dignitaries, local and state officials, and Lions Club members. According to Lions Club President Floyd Mizener, the event originally included all teachers from Downers Grove schools. But as the village grew over the years, the club began to focus on welcoming just the incoming teachers.

The Lions Club New Teacher Luncheon for District 99 took place Aug. 11, while staff members new to District 58 were welcomed Aug. 18.



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"We are always touched that the Lions Club members host a luncheon for our new teachers before the start of the school year," District 99 Superintendent Mark McDonald said. "The new teachers feel very honored by the tradition... It is a thoughtful and generous gesture, and one that makes our team feel very much part of the fabric of this community."

Founded in 1917 by Chicagoan Melvin Jones, Lions Club International's main focus is to serve the community.

Mizener said that focus was top of mind when the luncheons began in 1931. The purpose of the luncheons was to create dialogue with the educators, as well as promote cooperation and partnership among community and school.

District 58 Superintendent Kari

Cremascoli also feels that the annual tradition is a great way to welcome new teachers to the community.

"It provides us with an opportunity to share a little about the wonderful community that we serve and to celebrate each of them as new members and contributors to our community," she said.

Scott Kasik, principal of Downers Grove North High School said the luncheon illustrates the club's generosity.

"It is a wonderful example for new teachers to see the close connection between community organizations and schools," he said.

Michael Krugman, principal of District 58's Whittier School echoed Kasik's thoughts.

"The Lions Club New Teacher Luncheon is a nice way to bring together all our new educators, welcome them to the Downers

Grove community, and show them the support and dedication our community has toward education," he said.

This year's event included the opportunity for attendees to see Lions Club memorabilia that highlighted the years of service to the community. Additionally, the flag used for the Pledge of Allegiance has flown over the U.S. Capitol Building at the request of former U.S. Sen. Charles Percy to honor Mizener.

Leading the group in patriotic song was Lions member Robert Dankwardt, a 93-year-old World War II veteran and 35-year member of the Lions Club. Brett Wolf, a new addition to Downers Grove South High School's special services department, said he thinks the luncheon was a great event.

"It's nice to have that connection with the community," he said.