UF IFAS
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

2021

UF/IFAS Superior Accomplishment Awards

Recognizing those who contribute outstanding and meritorious service, improve efficiency and/or economy, or add to the quality of life provided to students and employees.

In 1988, the Florida Legislature established the creation of a Superior Accomplishment Awards program to recognize excellence in university service. At each of the twelve universities, divisional awards are presented, and divisional honorees are eligible for university-wide recognition.

The University of Florida established seven divisions based on unit or organizational lines. UF/IFAS comprises one such division. Within each division, there are eight award categories. Each divisional-level award recipient receives a cash award of $200, a framed certificate, a commemorative coffee mug, and a gift bag. Divisional honorees are automatically eligible to compete for university-level awards, which include eight $1,000 and eight $2,000 cash awards. Each university-level honoree will have their name inscribed on a permanent plaque located in the President's Board Room in Tigert Hall.

Committee Members

Sarah M. Kern, Chair
Administrative Specialist II, Ft. Lauderdale Research and Education Center

Ann Hartman
Agricultural Assistant III, Everglades Research and Education Center

Amie M. Imler
Lecturer, Department of Animal Sciences

Samantha Murray
Public Relations Specialist II, UF/IFAS Communications

Darryl B. Palmer
Editor, UF/IFAS Communications

Karen Williams
Senior Biological Scientist, Ft. Lauderdale Research and Education Center

Kellie Helseth-Anderson

Kellie Helseth-Anderson is a 4-H Program Assistant for St. Johns County. She is an important part of the county's 4-H Youth Development team, serving as the first point of contact for youth, volunteers, and others who wish to know about Florida 4-H. She assists St. Johns County 4-H clientele by providing excellent communications, managing records and bookkeeping. She coordinates the 4-H public speaking program with public and private elementary and middle schools. She has a track record of taking pride in her responsibilities and emulating kindness and service in all aspects of her work.

Above and beyond, Kellie provides expert training to youth in St. Johns County's 4-H Equine program and provides expert hands-on learning experiences with the 4-H Horse Judging Team, Hippology Team and summer camps. Her background in the equine industry has been an asset to youth who participate in these programs. The success her teams have achieved at the local, regional, and state levels indicate that they gained a strong understanding in all topic areas covered by Ms. Helseth-Anderson.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed all aspects of our lives and has required revision and reinvention of all 4-H club work. In the spring of 2020, as 4-H programs were challenged to go virtual, Kellie stepped up to assist the 4-H agent with developing virtual programs and contests for youth and adult volunteers. This included a nine-part video series about visiting natural areas in the county and identifying plants and animals to encourage youth and families to leave their houses and safely experience natural St. Johns County. This video series has received over 450 views so far on YouTube.

Kellie is described as the nerve center of St. Johns County 4-H and provides much-needed support and encouragement to all 4-H families, creating a strong sense of community during these uncertain times.

Her work is above and beyond her job description because of her willingness to do whatever it takes to make the St. Johns County 4-H program successful.

Kimberly Lottinville

Kimberly Lottinville is the Administrative Specialist for both the Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants (CAIP) and the Pesticide Information Office. She is the one-stop shop for all administrative issues, including processing grants, fiscal management, and human resource responsibilities for two growing centers. When the Pesticide Information Office merged with CAIP in 2019, her workload increased exponentially, and Kim was responsible for seamlessly merging the two units. Moreover, when COVID-19 restrictions began, Kim was able to take charge during the busiest months of the grant applications period by setting up video meetings with the primary investigators, providing timelines for each project, and providing a faster turnaround. In the spring of 2020, the Center processed more grant applications to more funding agencies than ever before. Though the coronavirus shutdown had left everyone confused, Kim took charge of the situation and elevated her work to unprecedented levels. Without Kim's devotedness to her work, the Center would not have been able to secure hundreds of thousands of dollars in contracts and grants.

It is her skill and devotion to her work that so many people praised in their letters of support. Her organizational skills keep faculty on deadlines to complete their grant submissions on time. She is the moral compass on how to do it "the right way." Kim has a cheerful and carefree attitude that sets a nice tone for the office and elevates the entire program. She will even catch and release snakes and frogs that get into the building!

Kim is truly a light to others. She has been described as the "center at the Center". Her position title may be Administrative Specialist, but she could also be called the glue that keeps the units together, a wildlife relocator, a problem-solver extraordinaire, an events coordinator, and a true friend.

Shirley Bradley

The North Florida Research and Education Center - Suwannee Valley (NFREC-SV) is fortunate to have Shirley Bradley taking care of things in the main office building, at the farm office building, the conference room, the greenhouses, under the pole barn and even in the garden and flower beds!

As a Custodial Worker II, her duties include all aspects of making sure facilities are clean, safe and well-maintained. But to the faculty and staff, Shirley Bradley is so much more! It is her care for the people she works with that makes her especially deserving of this award. Before COVID-19, events at the Center had increased dramatically due to its higher visibility, great accommodations and fabulous customer service. NFREC-SV hosted up to 100 events during the award period, which included meetings, workshops, farm tours, and trainings. Shirley makes sure the facilities are clean, supplies are purchased, and tables and chairs set up according to the organizers. She steps up to help with planning and implementing the events herself, coming in early or staying late to assist with registration, serving meals, and organizing the space. Because of her hospitality and customer service, she gives a good impression of the Center and its people to visitors; many comments are received on the cleanliness of the facilities and great customer services provided.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Shirley's activities changed dramatically. Her role, as the unit began to phase-in personnel, made her the key person responsible for the daily sanitizing of the facilities and making sure everyone had the needed PPE and supplies. She keeps contact surfaces sanitized, hand sanitizing stations supplied with sanitizer and masks available for faculty and staff.

Shirley is known as the chief "encourager" at the Center. She is always positive, and even when the challenge seems large, Shirley Bradley is the first one to say, "We've got this!"

She has always gone above and beyond the expectations of her position but, with the extra challenge of COVD-19, Shirley Bradley has done an exceptional job that deserves to be recognized throughout UF and IFAS with the Superior Accomplishment Award.

James Davison

James Davison is an Agricultural Assistant II at the Plant Science Research and Education Unit (PSREU) in Citra. His primary responsibilities are to oversee and assist faculty and staff with all field research operations, which include land preparation, pest thresholds and fumigation determination, research project layout, assistance in data collection, and all equipment operations and service.

While James has vast responsibilities, he has always been curious and eager to learn, asking questions beyond his everyday duties to understand experimental design and the objectives of all research trials under his care. He is the experienced primary operator and mechanic for the Unit's two Wintersteiger forage plot harvesters, highly intricate machines valued at $200,000 each. James' presence and expertise were crucial for maintaining and saving research trials while the university was shut down because of COVID-19. He came to work beyond his fixed work schedule to oversee all experiments, making sure they were running well and was trusted by the faculty to collect needed data from their research trials. Being the truly dedicated employee that he is, James volunteered to harvest several wheat and oat variety trials to the tune of 22 acres! He normally harvests with the aid of three to five people, but this year, as an essential employee, he performed the harvest himself and saved irreplaceable seed from two agronomy department experiments.

"James is a joy to interact with," writes one colleague, "well-respected and always willing to teach the knowledge he has gained from his experiences." Another writes, "Having so many professors depending on him with their crop data, James always goes the extra mile to be sure it is exactly what the doctor ordered—no pun intended!" And perhaps to sum up how James' colleagues and professors feel about him: "James is dedicated, caring, and has such a strong commitment for excellence. He compliments precisely the stellar community of past Superior Accomplishment Award recipients."

Clyde Morrow

Clyde Morrow works at the Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center (FLREC) as a Custodial II in the maintenance department. Clyde's responsibilities include all things custodial for the main buildings, student housing and laboratories: cleaning facilities, trash removal, electrical lighting changeouts, painting, and troubleshooting problems. He excels at all his duties—work that is important and necessary for the smooth operation of a large facility and often taken for granted, receiving few accolades. Clyde stands out because he performs all the above duties but has eagerly taken on so many other responsibilities outside of his normal job description. He performs all safety inspections of exit and emergency lighting, emergency showers, AED and first aid kits. In short, Clyde keeps the folks at the FLREC safe and sound! He also volunteered to cross-train on fleet vehicle, golf cart, and farm equipment maintenance and mechanics.

As the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Clyde was designated essential and responsible for cleaning and disinfecting the Center's workspaces several times each day. While staff were working from home, Clyde remained on station to receive packages, email faculty and staff of their deliveries, and sort incoming mail. When the maintenance supervisor was not on station, Clyde performed all daily inspections and troubleshooting of irrigation pumps, boilers, and HVAC pumps for proper function. He made sure, along with a skeleton crew, that FLREC remained operational. When the ground maintenance department was down by one employee, Clyde seamlessly stepped into another new role to take his place. He learned heavy equipment operation of tractors, field mowers, and Bobcats, to name a few. You name it, Clyde can do it! He is truly a jack of all trades and master of all! And he does this with a smile on his face and an engaging personality to boot.

Well-respected and loved by all at the FLREC, one colleague writes, "Clyde is always ready to greet you with a smile, a little conversation, and a kind word that can make your day that much brighter," also noting that Clyde "is an exceptional employee and always ready and willing to take that extra step to make sure it's done right." Clyde's nominator writes, "Your cooperation to work with any and all faculty and staff, to take on and assume new roles makes you such an asset to the team." Thank you, Clyde, for your superior work ethic and all you do to make every day run smoothly for all who work at the FLREC.

Thomas James

Thomas James is a Biological Scientist at the Indian River Research and Education Center (IRREC) in Ft. Pierce. He works in the Citrus Horticulture Lab with Dr. Rhuanito Ferrarezi, whose program includes 300 acres of groves located at the IRREC farm, as well as on private groves. The program currently has six major research projects underway. In his job capacity, James serves as the grove operations manager, which may include designing experimental grove plans and planting trees. A superb grove manager and workflow facilitator, he brings over 45 years of experience to the program.

Tom supervises a department with 15 other members and works alongside research assistants, post-docs, graduate students and visiting scholars. He guarantees that each member's tasks go smoothly. Tom works with the staff members to ensure they have the right equipment to perform their independent tasks. He also makes sure data collection is submitted on time.

Before Tom joined Dr. Ferrarezi's lab, he was on track to retire. But new and exciting research in Huanglongning (HLB), a disease which has been devastating citrus groves throughout Florida and world-wide, motivated him to postpone his retirement. Florida's entire citrus industry benefits from this critical research.

In the past fiscal year, Tom has assisted Dr. Ferrarezi in expanding his field grove experiments into local commercial groves, which increased the department's active field experiments by 45 percent. He has also led the implementation of a 20-acre scion and rootstock variety trial, which involved hours of coordinating manpower, designing the experimental plot, installing irrigation and planting nearly 5,000 trees.

Tom also has gained the respect and admiration of citrus grove owners throughout the region. "[Tom's] unique ability to offer real-world citrus production experience to the scientific community is invaluable," writes one grower.

Tom has befriended international students and visitors to help them acclimate to American culture and has even helped a student learn to drive and obtain their driver's license. Tom likes to teach others the history of Florida citrus production and how difficult it is for growers to deal with HLB.

In his nomination letter, Dr. Ferrarezi writes, "Tom is a noble human being, sharing my personal values of assisting people in need and providing a shoulder to relieve life's daily frustrations and translating it into action."

Andrea Bohn

Andrea Bohn is Project Manager for the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems (LSIL), housed in the Animal Sciences department. Funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, LSIL manages over 45 multi-disciplinary research projects that address poverty and malnutrition in Africa and Asia.

Andrea's main responsibilities are to monitor and evaluate research project progress by ensuring awardees adhere to workplans and submit reports on time. Additionally, she leads the effort in knowledge sharing and organizing meetings, conference calls, stakeholder consultations and all program events. She is the main point of contact for 45 principal investigators affiliated with LSIL's 20 partner U.S. universities and organizations, as well as 43 foreign universities and government agencies. In the short time Andrea has been with the University of Florida, she has brought her previous years of experience managing USAID global projects, along with years of business and management skills.

Andrea was essential in organizing LSIL's 2020 Annual General Meeting, a huge five-day global event. Enter COVID-19 into the picture—all that global event planning was put on hold. Virtual planning resumed, only to have funding fall through from an outside hosting facilitator. At that point, Andrea took the helm and taught herself all she needed to become a master online facilitator and trainer so the entire staff (the UF team and U.S. and foreign partners) could hold all their sessions seamlessly online. She became an expert in new technologies to make the meeting more interactive and pulled off a well-organized, exemplary virtual event for more 100 international participants.

"Andrea is contagiously enthusiastic," writes one colleague. "She energizes others in teamwork and is very effective in getting the best out of people." Another colleague said, "[Andrea] somehow manages to handle a massive workload with a consistently positive attitude, one that cannot help but rub off on anyone who interacts with her." We thank and congratulate Andrea for being such an integral and essential part of our University of Florida family.

Jeff Steele

Jeff Steele is a Senior Agriculture Assistant at the Range Cattle Research and Education Center (RCREC) in Ona. His regular duties include the safe operation and maintenance of tractors, mowers, and field equipment. Other duties include pesticide application, plumbing repairs of livestock water supply, wire fence construction and repair, and prescribed pasture burning. Residing at the Center, Jeff provides after-hours security of the facilities and nuisance animal management. During his weekend rotation he also monitors livestock.

But one other thing that makes the Range Cattle REC lucky to have Jeff as an employee are his welding skills. In the past year he has:

- Repaired the damage on a specialized mower;
- Modified a tractor to reduce labor in building and repairing fence lines;
- Repaired and maintained the Center's Marden Drum Chopper, an essential piece of equipment for a grant-funded research project.

Together, these have saved the Center at least $5,000 in repair costs alone.

Jeff often arrives to work at 5 a.m. to apply pesticides in order to prevent drift onto neighboring properties. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, he has volunteered to monitor the livestock every weekend to limit the potential exposure of employees who would otherwise need to travel to the research center from their homes.

One of the faculty members at RCREC writes, "Jeff is truly dedicated to the research center and I believe his is long overdue for the recognition and praise for his hard work." Other colleagues have echoed this statement, agreeing enthusiastically that Jeff Steele deserves the recognition of the Superior Accomplishment Award.

Damien Chevaillier

Damien Chevaillier is the Finance and Administrative Manager for the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems (LSIL), a part of the Food Systems Institute. LSIL is funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and involves more than 45 research and development projects in seven countries on the continents of Africa and Asia. Mr. Chevaillier oversees and implements financial planning and management and is responsible for logistical and administrative support to the LSIL. He ensures that all activities are conducted in compliance with donor, federal, state and University of Florida regulations and policies, in a manner that is consistent with the objectives of the Innovation Lab.

In 2020, Demian was instrumental in helping the Innovation Lab secure a five-year extension of funding from USAID. Valued at $19 million, the grant will fund phase II of the lab, which focuses on using animal-source foods to improve the nutrition, incomes, livelihoods, and health of the poor in seven countries. Acquiring this grant required much internal planning, foresight, flexibility and close collaborations with partners within UF and without.

Fiscal year 2020 proved to be the most challenging to date; delayed funding required flexibility, patience, and the ability to outline recommendations on which projects should receive funding and how much should be awarded.

Demian has been praised for his dedication, knowledge and willingness to explain the complexities of the “fiscal spiderweb” involved in large-scale international grant projects. His calm demeanor and command of French and English have been particularly helpful in working with partners across three continents.

In one letter of support, a colleague writes, “ [Demian] cares. He cares that the funds are utilized in strict alignment with the regulations and procedures, he cares that every activity and every person has enough funds to do the work they are supposed to do; but overall, he cares that the LSIL has an impact on the lives of the people that depend on the successful implementation of its different projects.”

David Depatie

Dave Depatie is an Instructional Designer with the Food and Resource Economics department. He is responsible for the design, development and implementation of the department's classroom and technology-based needs. He works closely with faculty to assess their technology needs, develop appropriate classroom support, and trains faculty on how to use technology in the classroom. He develops and designs learning aids such as instructional guides and web simulations to assist in the transfer of knowledge, skills, and abilities. He helps faculty design Canvas sites for online courses, making sure the material can be delivered effectively to students. In addition, he is responsible for maintaining the department's website, including being the lead person to collect, summarize, and share news about the department.

His nominators agree that Dave deserves recognition because of the amount of work and care he puts into making sure the department's online courses and website are successful. Prior to COVID-19, Dave's normal workload involved supporting faculty who teach online, focusing on a handful of large classes with a group of four to five instructors. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, like many departments, Food and Resource Economics suddenly needed to move all faculty online, including those with little to no experience with online systems.

One faculty member recalls: "You can imagine my angst, as I had never before taught an online course. Dave Depatie provided me and others in the department with critical assistance in a time of critical need. He did so with an extremely friendly and energetic attitude, even though the demands on his time to assist so many were, I'm sure, extremely stressful."

Due to his efforts, the department was successfully able to move 100% of their classes online for the fall semester. Dave also has been working with faculty to test and transition to the new HyFlex online teaching model, making courses more accessible to students who cannot attend in person while still maintaining a traditional classroom component.

Brad Dicks

Brad Dicks is the Lead Farm Supervisor at the UF/IFAS Dairy Research Unit. With approximately 1,000 dairy animals and a current staff size of 21, the Dairy Unit supports research, teaching and Extension through on-site research, student training, and holding Extension events. Brad's normal role is to oversee and execute the cropping plan for the Unit's 1,100 acres. In this role, he works with his staff to prepare fields for planting, fertilization, weed control, irrigation, and harvesting of forages used to feed the herd. He also directs the feed crew who prepare rations and deliver feed to groups of animals daily.

In the fall of 2019, Mr. Dicks took on the role of Interim Manager. During this period, the Dairy Unit was experiencing a series of financial, administrative and staffing setbacks that seriously affected employee morale and the effectiveness of the organization. Under his leadership, he instituted a long list of changes that brought the Unit's finances under control and improved staff morale. As one faculty member put it, "It is no exaggeration to say that Brad Dicks was instrumental in saving the Dairy Unit from financial ruin and closure."

After Eric Williams was hired as new Dairy Unit Manager in February 2020, Brad was asked to continue to serve in a greater leadership role. When COVID-19 started to affect the day-to-day operations throughout UF, he agreed to lead the Unit on alternate days. This strategy helped to ensure that the Unit continued to function safely throughout the pandemic. The massive drop in demand for milk has been difficult for everyone in the state's dairy industry, but thanks to reforms put in place by Mr. Dicks in 2019 and 2020, the Unit has been much more resilient than it had been formerly.

Colleagues call Brad a true team player who's proven he can lead the course through difficult straits. Letters of support from his peers praise Brad for his experience, his leadership and people skills, and his willingness to care for the well-being of the people and the animals at the Dairy Unit.

As one supporter writes, "Brad clearly shows himself to be someone who always seeks to evolve and to bring the best to everyone around him."

William (Buck) Nelson

Buck Nelson is a Research Coordinator II at the Plant Science Research and Education Unit (PSREU) in Citra, Florida. He supervises all field research at the unit for about 90 faculty members across multiple UF/IFAS departments; oversees 11 staff members that manage vegetables, row crops, fruit crops, forages, and pesticide and fertilizer department; and manages 28 acres of field research for the organic farming program and maintains all the needed certifications. He also oversees maintenance of various research facilities and helps faculty members organize field activities for students.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have disrupted many activities at the PSREU, but that didn't stop Buck from stepping up to save valuable research and to support student learning. In March 2020, the university reduced the number of hours staff could be on site at the PSREU. Faculty members and students could not go to their field trials to collect data and do regular upkeep. Buck was instrumental in making sure the research programs he managed stayed on track. During the three hours per week he could be at the unit, Buck would record video, take photos or video chat with faculty while he was at their research sites. He made sure that crops were harvested at the right time so that valuable data would not be lost and that fields were kept clear of weeds or, at one point, hungry birds looking for a quick snack. One letter of support noted that without Mr. Nelson's efforts, the researcher's breeding program would have been delayed by at least two years and that some of the genetic resources involved would never have been recovered. Another recommender wrote: "If Buck were not willing to be creative, trials would have been lost. The springtime is a busy time for field research and this innovative thinking helped save hundreds of field trials."

Mr. Nelson also helped ensure student learning didn't falter during the COVID-19 lockdown, helping create videos and virtual tours for faculty transitioning their classes to a 100% online format. One student had this to say about Mr. Nelson's work: "One of my classes normally makes field trips to the research station at Citra where Mr. Nelson works. When COVID caused this class to be fully online, my professor created virtual tours for us to experience. Mr. Nelson helped in this endeavor by playing a starring role in some of these videos and showed us a perspective on what happens at a university research station."

Jarred Shellhouse

During the award period, Jarred Shellhouse served as the Marketing and Communications Specialist for the Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC) department. (He has since transitioned to the role of communications manager for the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.) In the AEC department, Jarred's duties included maintaining and updating the departmental website, developing integrated communications strategies, managing departmental social media accounts, analyzing audience trends, and collaborating with communicators and faculty across campus.

Jarred is being recognized for his performance on a handful of special projects. He created an agricultural teacher directory that houses approximately 500 detailed entries. He supported the development of resources for Teach Ag Online in COVID-19, a resource repository for ag teachers across the country to continue lessons with at-home labs, self-directed learning or online platforms. This webpage has received more than 8,000 unique page views. He played an important role in transitioning the new Florida Agriculture and Natural Resources Summer Series into a six-part webinar format, resulting in 578 people registered for at least one of the webinars. In addition, he oversaw the creation and adoption of a new AEC department logo, which had not been updated in more than a decade. Furthermore, Jarred went above and beyond when it came to supporting the Association of International Agricultural and Extension Education 2020 conference. He not only designed the conference program, but also secured $2,500 worth of program ads and eventually produced a 386-page document highlighting the conference elements, ads, and proceedings.

In their letters of support, Jarred's nominators emphasize his enthusiasm, creativity, and inclusivity. As one letter put it: "In the past year, Jarred's work performance has been punctuated with special projects, COVID restrictions, and his own personal pursuits in graduate school. What was so amazing was that through each of these projects and challenges, Jarred was always upbeat, encouraging and positive. He tackled all of these projects professionally and with the excellence that he has come to be known for in the department."

Danielle Shu

Danielle Shu is an Academic Advisor in the Food and Resource Economics department, where she advises undergraduate students on degree requirements, class selection, academic policies and campus resources, and keeps the undergraduate coordinator and department chair updated about student performance. She also supports student recruitment and prepares students for the job market.

Danielle is being recognized for her innovative approach to advising students and keeping them on track to graduate. During the award period, she developed a monitoring system called Plan for Student Success (PASS), which alerts the department to potentially struggling students. Danielle then works with students one-on-one to identify barriers they are facing, help them prioritize their course loads, work, and other commitments. She meets with these students several times over the semester to monitor their progress. The PASS program has helped students who were feeling overwhelmed feel more focused and successful. Her regular check-ins help students feel like they are supported in the department and that they can get assistance when they need it. Since the implementation of the program, the number of students on academic probation has gone down significantly: in a typical semester, eight to 10 students would find themselves on probation, but in the Fall 2020 semester, only one student was on probation. Furthermore, through the PASS program Ms. Shu helped two students graduate in 2020 who would have otherwise slipped through the cracks without her efforts.

The implementation of the PASS program goes above and beyond the typical work of an academic advisor. Rather than operate reactively and intervening only when students are in trouble academically, Danielle's approach is proactive, reaching out to students before they are on probation. In addition, she is the only academic advisor for the department and has also taken on additional duties normally handled by the department's academic assistant. As one nominator's letter of support said, "As a former undergraduate coordinator in the department, I can attest to this being the most active advising I have seen with our students, and I believe the result is going to be higher graduation rates and a stronger student body."

Cassandra Key

Cassandra Key is an Administrative Assistant with the UF/IFAS Nature Coast Biological Station (NCBS). She handles all fiscal aspects of the station and interacts with multiple units and other institutions on the use of the NCBS facility as well as the Seahorse Key Marine Lab.

In 2020, Cassandra lead development of the station's Educational Business Activity Plan, a complex document that quantifies all unit costs for the purposes of a federal audit of activities where the university collects fees for services. This included class use of Seahorse Key for overnight stays, salaries, vehicle and fuel use, maintenance and repairs, and equipment and supplies needed for activities. Her meticulous work helped NCBS develop a transparent and justifiable cost structure for using the facilities. The EBA she constructed is currently in operation and has been used as an example for other units. She also helped to plan the 2019 Florida Sea Grant (FSG) annual meeting and prepare for their annual review. FSG at that time was understaffed and still reeling from the untimely death of its director, Dr. Karl Havens. Cassandra volunteered to work extra hours at night and on weekends to help Florida Sea Grant, while still performing all her job duties at NCBS. In October 2019, she helped the station in purchasing 4,320 tons of sand for two living shoreline projects in Cedar Key.

In addition to knocking her job duties out of the park, Cassandra also goes above and beyond to volunteer for Extension programs with the station, including the Horseshoe Crab Watch Program, where she is a frequent and reliable asset, volunteering on weekends, evenings and over lunch breaks, often bringing her family along.

Peers describe Cassandra as the glue that holds the NCBS team together and keeps everything running smoothly and productively. She represents UF/IFAS with exceptional professionalism and a consistently positive attitude for all faculty, staff students and the public.

One supporter writes, "Cassandra is kind, funny and extremely hard working in her job, and she is a team member that I know our whole team depends on."

Allyson Trimble

Allyson Trimble is an Academic Advisor in the Animal Sciences department, where she serves an undergraduate population of approximately 500 students on an annual basis. Her primary responsibilities lie in supporting the department's undergraduate students and academic programs. Allyson excels at balancing the advising needs of both upper and lower division students within the department's pre-professional and industry specializations. She does all this while serving as a liaison between the department, college, university, alumni, and industry to ensure students graduate on time, engage in meaningful connections and experiences, and place in related careers post-graduation.

Although Allyson's efforts every year are worthy of recognition, she went above and beyond the call of duty in several ways during this award period. From an advising perspective, she took notice of the growing number of students struggling emotionally and psychologically. Pre-COVID, she initiated social events like Game Nights to build community within a large major. She also reached out to engage those who needed help individually. For a major with over 500 students, the majority of which are high-achieving and pre-professional, the list was long – and only got longer with the toll COVID has taken on students.

Outside of her position, Allyson serves as club advisor for the Gator Collegiate Cattlewomen, assists with coaching the department's Intercollegiate Livestock Judging Team, commits time and energy to the department's youth Extension programs, and secured funding from the Florida Beef Council for the creative development and installation of interpretation boards at the UF/IFAS South Beef Teaching Unit.

Ms. Trimble's nominator writes, "Allyson's grasp of the changes in advising methods, implementation of new advising tools and creative approaches to reaching students where they are, has been transformative to our academic support team. Above and beyond is her mantra."

Justin Callaham

Justin Callaham is a Lecturer in the Animal Sciences department, where his primary instructional responsibilities include hands-on activities such as practicum courses in horse management and laboratory experiences in reproductive physiology of domestic species. Justin is responsible for the organization of these courses, delivery of content and supervision of graduate teaching assistants, while simultaneously improving the teaching methods of graduate students.

During the award period, Justin led the instruction of over 100 undergraduate students during an active pandemic. Much of Justin's instruction is based on hands-on experiential learning that is very difficult to do in an online setting. However, he mobilized his unique skillset to completely reimagine laboratory and practicum classes. Specifically, Justin took traditional laboratory exercises and implemented online experiences that resulted in a similar, albeit unique experience, developing new interactive videos, take-home dissection kits and other novel tools that are extremely time-consuming to develop. He made the extra effort to ensure University of Florida students could continue gaining the experience and education they desired.

Outside of his job position, Justin continues to be a major contributor to the day-to-day management of the Horse Teaching and Horse Research Units he previously managed. He is also a major contributor to the development of interactive online tools for other department courses, including Introduction to Animal Sciences and the Florida International Dairy Academy. He actively ensures the information technology needs of the Animal Sciences department are met by sharing his personal expertise with various members of the department. This dedication also extends to the stakeholders with whom Justin frequently interacts to improve the Florida equine industry.

As his nominator writes, "Justin is the linchpin to the delivery of these very popular courses in the Department of Animal Sciences; however, his efforts go far beyond these described duties: improving student experiences, promoting the success of the Animal Sciences department and contributing to the long-term goals of the University."

Monika Oli

Dr. Monika Oli is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Microbiology and Cell Sciences, where she currently serves as the department's undergraduate coordinator. Dr. Oli's largest responsibility is the management of the prep room staff and materials, training and coordination of graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants, curriculum development and enhancement, as well as teaching a portion of sections for the department's microbiology labs. Approximately 2,500 students across campus take microbiology labs each year.

Within her position, Dr. Oli has demonstrated innovation and exceptional leadership in several ways throughout the award period. In January 2020, Dr. Oli planned and organized the department's first-ever faculty teaching retreat to discuss teaching-related issues and implement improvements in the curriculum. In March, responding to COVID-19 restrictions, she moved all microbiology labs online, so students did not need to come back to the lab after spring break, preventing exposure of faculty, staff, teaching assistants, and students. As it became clear the pandemic would continue to force lab experiences online, she created and designed a novel home lab microbiology kit to further enhance the online student experience in future semesters.

As described by her nominator, Monika's imagination, dedication, and creativity resulted in something most thought would not be possible. While many of her colleagues around the state and country have resorted to online simulations to teach similar labs virtually, Dr. Oli found a sound balance in providing hands-on microbiology lab experiences with the use of professional software and databases to enrich her curriculum. She has also freely shared her new educational curriculum with other instructors who approach her for advice, not just on the UF campus, but across the globe. Monika stepped up to solve a uniquely challenging problem with uniquely challenging constraints beyond the classroom without lowering her student learning expectations or curriculum standards.

Lorenzo Rossi

Dr. Lorenzo Rossi is an Assistant Professor of plant root biology at the UF/IFAS Indian River Research and Education Center (IRREC). His appointment in the UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences is 80% research and 20% teaching. Dr. Rossi aligns his programs with the Horticultural Science Department and the IRREC's missions, goals and strategies.

In his short time at UF, Lorenzo has proved himself to be a superb teacher and research scientist, with a novel approach to mentoring students and collegial teamwork. He has been a major contributor to the mission of UF/IFAS and IRREC.

Dr. Rossi was an important and integral team member on the design and writing of a USDA NIFA research grant that was submitted and awarded for a total of nearly $15 million. This research, which seeks to determine why citrus trees within proximity to oak trees appear to resist HLB, potentially holds enormous importance for Florida's citrus industry.

In 2020, his asynchronous online course, Root Rhizosphere Ecology, received the CALS Innovation in Teaching Award and a High-Quality designation from the UF Center of Teaching Excellence. Last year, 24 undergraduates and 56 graduate students from many countries participated in Rossi's course.

Dr. Rossi excels as a student advisor and mentor. Students and faculty alike note his skills in recognizing students' styles in their research and work, ascertaining their individual needs and then encouraging and supporting students to pursue their highest aspirations. He is also an active member of IRREC's dorm committee and serves as a judge at regional science fairs.

Dr. Rossi's attentiveness to student needs proved instrumental in preparing for the American Society of Horticultural Science (ASHS) annual meeting. Based on the results of a survey he devised, he organized and prepared graduate students for poster presentations and other competitions to elevate their experience. When the annual meeting transitioned to a virtual format, his students were prepared to produce presentations that were in many ways more effective than in-person competition.

His nominator writes, "In all opportunities, Dr. Rossi aims to identify ways to increase scientific discovery and launch new forces to help food producers feed the world's population. Rossi's visions are high and overarching, and his contributions during 2019-2020 are inarguably superior."

As a research collaborator, a teacher, and a mentor to his students, Dr. Lorenzo Rossi is truly deserving of the Superior Accomplishment Award.

Edmund Thralls

Ed Thralls is the Urban Horticulture Agent for UF/IFAS Extension Orange County. In his long and distinguished career, he has consistently gone above and beyond in educating homeowners in all aspects of horticulture, leading the Master Gardener Volunteer Program, diagnosing pests and diseases in the plant clinic, working closely with county administrators and myriad other responsibilities.

When the county Extension director (CED) retired in 2019, Ed took on the role of interim CED in addition to his regular Extension work. The Extension office in Orange County serves over 1.3 million residents, covers 14 acres and has a staff of 30. As CED, he was responsible for administration leadership for the whole Extension program in Orange County for over 11 months, four of which occurred during the complicated initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. During that period, Ed was described as the "long pole holding up the Extension tent," handling everything from upgrading office computers and hiring new staff, to replacing the HVAC system in the auditorium and repairing the greenhouse, to assuring that all employees felt safe during the pandemic.

After the new CED was onboarded in 2020, Ed proved a valuable resource to the incoming director, making for a very smooth translation to new leadership.

Ed Thralls' achievements in balancing his role as an Extension agent while serving as interim CED validate him as an all-star within the Extension community. As one nominator writes, "It is hard to picture anyone more deserving of this award than Ed Thralls, a determined, calm and dedicated Extension Agent, Interim Director, Acting Division Manager and public servant during a year of very complex and difficult times."

Rachel Pienta

Dr. Rachel Pienta is a 4-H Extension Agent II at UF/IFAS Extension Wakulla County; she also provides program support for Franklin County. Since 2017, she has developed a strong 4-H program in Wakulla and Franklin counties, taking membership from 36 to over 200 youth and growing her volunteer base from six to more than 40. She has also taught several camps and programs encouraging youth to become involved with their communities.

Not only is Dr. Pienta an excellent and hard-working faculty member, but she has dedicated herself to enriching the lives of people in her community. She devotes a tremendous amount of time and effort to committee work, volunteer service, and civic engagement well beyond the expectations of a 4-H faculty member.

During 2019-2020, Rachel served as the president of the Wakulla County Chamber of Commerce. In that role, she was actively engaged in several rural development initiatives. She was instrumental in creating an annual program to recognize the role of women in the local economy, as well as an event celebrating the history of Wakulla County. While serving on the Opportunity Florida Committee, she worked with rural development change agents across the Big Bend and Mid-Panhandle region to find and advocate ways to help the entire area recover after the economic devastation of Hurricane Michael. She also worked with the board of the Wakulla County's Economic Development Council and served on the board of directors for the United Partners for Human Services (UPHS), which advocates for public and private support for community needs such as senior centers, homeless, domestic violence and youth runaway shelters, and for services like mental and dental health services. She is also an active member of a sub-committee to address housing and homelessness in the region. As a member of the Coastal Optimist Club and the Wakulla County Youth Coalition, she helped raise funds for youth in the community. Rachel also is an ambassador for the Big Bend Hospice Program and an active member of Wakulla Rotary.

Rachel has been lauded by her colleagues and community partners as a skilled communicator who shares the community's vision, needs and ideas to make things happen. "If Rachel had a superpower," her nominator writes, "it would be her ability to see and make connections between diverse community actors – bringing them together to be more effective as change agents."

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