

2021 OUTSTANDING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION SPECIAL NEEDS TEACHER OF THE YEAR



Mary Ellen DeHaas has the rare ability to reach each student at their academic level, build their self-confidence, and instill a passion for learning regardless of reading or math levels, emotional needs, or student interests. The Food Production Program at the Greater Altoona Career and Technology Center (GACTC) is unique in that it follows the same task list as the Culinary Arts program, but introduces the concepts at a modified pace to allow for specially-designed instruction, accommodations, deeper understanding and meaningful progress for students who have an IEP or 504 Plan. Frequently, students transition to Mary Ellen's program after struggling to keep up with the pace of their original placement. Discouraged and defeated, these students found themselves touring the Food Production class, where they were greeted by her warm smile and hearty laugh. In

mere moments, you could visibly see the students' spirits lifting and their walls crumbling. Despite coming to the GACTC with other career aspirations, these students eagerly put away their steel toes and grabbed an apron.

Mary Ellen has an incredible understanding of how to educate the whole student. She teaches, supports, and nurtures all areas of her students' learning, from social-emotional to cognitive skills. She empowers students to feel confident in their own unique abilities. Her approach to education looks a little different – most teachers have designated traditional classroom spaces for their theory lessons – students sit in rows, read from textbooks, and take notes while listening to the teacher lecture. However, she understands that theory can be delivered in a hands-on manner, and that is exactly what her students need. She incorporates modeling, oral instructions, visuals, small groups, repetition, and frequent checks for understanding into every lesson. Although Mary Ellen does not use written tests as a tool for assessment, she assesses her students daily through observation and oral questioning. She pulls students aside and asks them the same questions that she would have asked on a written test. Her students leave GACTC with the skills required to secure and maintain competitive employment and the independent living skills to be a functioning adult. In her kitchen, she understands that the best recipe for success is a pinch of encouragement, a dash of patience, and an extra side of love. In June, Mary Ellen retired from her position as Food Production instructor, ending her illustrious thirty-one year career.

Mary Ellen was nominated by Chelsea Gibbons, Special Education/Special Populations Facilitator, Greater Altoona Career and Technology Center.



Pictured from left to right: *Eric Palmer, Executive Director; **Mary Ellen DeHaas, 2021 Outstanding Career and Technical Education Special Needs Teacher of the Year** and Food Production Instructor; and Chelsea Gibbons, Special Education/Special Populations Facilitator; Greater Altoona Career and Technology Center*