

TO: Board of Education

FROM: Randall Booker, Superintendent

SUBJECT: Arthur Hecht Volunteer of the Year Award - 2016

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**I. SUPPORT INFORMATION**

Katie Korotzer, a long-time volunteer who played a vital role in creating the Fall Fest 5k, securing passage of the education parcel tax, and streamlining fundraising and grants for the Piedmont schools, will be honored with this year's Arthur Hecht Volunteer of the Year Award. The award is presented each year to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the community and to Piedmont's youth through volunteer service over a period of many years.

The clear choice for this year's award, Ms. Korotzer has been a dedicated volunteer in the schools and community since moving to Piedmont in 2005. Her years and depth of service, and her inclusive, collaborative style and understated leadership, have benefitted Piedmont youth in many direct and indirect ways.

Joined by PHS Advanced Placement Art Student Caroline Welch, Ms. Korotzer will be awarded with Caroline's original piece in recognition of her service.

This award is presented annually to individuals who have volunteered their efforts over a period of time and made a difference because of their involvement and commitment to Piedmont's youth. Following are the previous recipients: Hunter McCreary (1998); Ann Chandler (1999); Ruth Cuming (2000); Lisa Lomenzo (2001); jointly by Cathie Geddeis and Marion Souyoultzis (2002); jointly by Fritz and Mary Wooster (2003); Elizabeth (Betsy) Gentry (2004); Cynthia Gorman (2005); Grier Graff (2006); Julia Burke (2007); Maude Pervere (2008); jointly to Anne-Marie Lamarche and Mark Menke (2009); Janiele Maffei Tovani (2010); Andrea Swenson (2011) and June Monach (2012), Mary Ireland and Bill Drum (2013), Ray Perman (2014), Jennifer Fox (2015).

Art Hecht was well known as a volunteer dedicated to serving students in Piedmont and Oakland. He was a member of Piedmont's Board of Education from 1970 to 1982, and instrumental in developing Millennium High School, Piedmont's alternative high school. Established in 1998, the Arthur Hecht Award honors both Hecht's memory and extraordinary individuals who continue his legacy of service.

**II. RECOMMENDATION: PRESENTATION**

Present Katie Korotzer with the 2016 Arthur Hecht Volunteer of the Year Award.

## **Katie Korotzer Honored with the 2016 Arthur Hecht Award**

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Like many Piedmont families, the Korotzers moved to Piedmont because of the excellent public schools, but they didn't know anyone in the community. That changed quickly. With her two sons, TJ and Nick, enrolled at Havens Elementary School, Ms. Korotzer became a regular volunteer at Havens, working on the *Highlights*, serving hot lunch, and coordinating after-school enrichment programs. "I met so many of my friends through volunteering," she said.

Since then, Ms. Korotzer has taken on increasingly ambitious volunteer roles -- creating new programs, building consensus to address and resolve difficult issues, and always striving to improve and expand opportunities for students. Everyone who works with her admires her hard work, inclusiveness, humility, and graciousness.

In 2009-10, she served on the committee to explore block scheduling at Piedmont Middle School. The committee studied various options, and Ms. Korotzer is widely credited with ensuring that parents, students, teachers and administrators had a voice in the discussions and that all viewpoints were considered. Esther Rogers, who served with Ms. Korotzer on this committee, praised her for developing a truly inclusive process. "Katie has really good judgment of how to approach the issues," Rogers said. "She's always receptive to hearing what others have to say, and she makes sure everyone feels heard. She's not out front but she does the hard, behind-the-scenes work, and she does it in a productive, collaborative way."

In 2010, Ms. Korotzer teamed up with another parent volunteer, Donna Williamson, to create the Fall Fest 5k. This fun run, which coincides with the Piedmont Harvest Festival, promotes awareness of Piedmont Unified's Wellness Center and raises funds to support its programs for middle and high school students. Although the Fall Fest 5k didn't exist until a few years ago, it is now an established Piedmont tradition.

Williamson explained, "The Wellness Center Committee was looking for ways to raise money to support the wellness programs and we came up with the idea of the race. Not

many were willing to jump in to organize it because it was a massive undertaking, especially in the first few years. Katie volunteered because she liked that the event had a family and wellness focus.” “We had no idea what we were getting in to,” Williamson said. “Having people run on City streets turns out to be a really big deal. But Katie doesn’t back away from challenges. She has incredible organization skills and genuine motivation to help kids and the community.”

Mary Kelly, who served with Ms. Korotzer on the Wellness Center Advisory Board, said, “Given her quiet demeanor, it was stunning what she accomplished. She brought professionalism to the project and went to the City, Police, Fire, City Council, to propose the run. Out of sheer grace, dignity and respectful negotiations she won everyone over, and the City had confidence in her. The [Fall Fest] is so well run we take it for granted now, but it would not exist but for her. She’s a wonderful person who makes things happen.” Kelly added, “She’s just a remarkable combination of grit and grace.”

In 2012-13, Ms. Korotzer teamed up with Doug Ireland to run the parcel tax campaign. The measure, approved by roughly 77% of the voters, provides critical funding for the schools and makes up roughly 25% of the District’s budget. “I really loved working on this because I enjoyed meeting and talking with so many people in the community. The community is so well-informed and engaged, and so supportive of the schools,” she said. Ireland and others who worked on the campaign credit Ms. Korotzer with bringing in individuals who were not initially in favor of the parcel tax, and ultimately improving the campaign because of this.

In 2014, she became President of the Piedmont High School Parent Club, working regularly with Principal Brent Daniels, and facilitating communication among parents, support groups, and the school administration. In this role, she was also responsible for leading the council of parent club presidents (then known as APCP), and coordinating efforts with the Piedmont Education Foundation. She quickly recognized that there were inefficiencies and duplication of effort among these groups -- which share the common purpose of supporting the schools -- as well as confusion in the community about the different fundraising campaigns. Although serving as the PHS parent club president is essentially a full-time job, she didn’t hesitate to take on the added challenge of reorganizing and merging these groups.

Working closely with PEF President Mary Ireland, and once again engaging all stakeholders, Ms. Korotzer developed plans to merge the parent clubs and PEF. This merger has led to more efficient and effective fundraising, better alignment of grants with the school district’s budget process, shared infrastructure, and more coordinated communication and messaging among the six school sites. “Katie seems so low key but she’s got intense drive and commitment, and impressive organizational capacity. She was completely unflagging in her energy on this, and all as a volunteer! She knew that we needed to change the way the Foundation and the parent clubs were operating, and she was focused on finding solutions. She doesn’t get caught in her own vision so she’s always willing to work with people with different viewpoints,” said Ireland. “She doesn’t care about the spotlight, she just cares about doing the right thing and she’s willing to do the hard work to get it done, and to do it in the most collaborative way,” Ireland said.

Despite the time and effort required to plan and implement the merger, Ms. Korotzer remained fully engaged in her responsibilities with the PHS parent club. Molly Ashford, who serves with her on both the PEF Board and PHS parent club board said, "Her work with parents is tremendous. She's always there to respond to parents' concerns and always working to bring new people into the parent club." Yuri Tada, the former Co-President of the Piedmont Appreciating Diversity Committee, echoed these comments. "Katie warmly welcomed us and encouraged us to participate and share our concerns about sensitive topics concerning diversity. She always responded in a fair, respectful, supportive manner," Tada said. "She helped PADC navigate issues with teachers at the high school. It was delightful working with her, and this award is so well-deserved because she works hard for the students," Tada added.

An example of her dedication to improving the lives of students is the change, made this year, from the long-standing tradition of a Senior Tea for girls and their mothers and a Senior Barbeque for boys and their fathers. In recent years, there have been increasing complaints that these traditions were antiquated, failed to recognize non-traditional families, and fostered confining gender roles to the point where some students and families felt excluded.

Ms. Korotzer met with a transgender student and other students, and concluded it was time to reexamine these gender-based events. A subsequent survey of high school Juniors, Seniors, their parents, and high school teachers and staff confirmed that most students wanted change, but some parents who cherish these traditions wanted them to continue. Ashford said, "This was difficult, and Katie wanted to give everyone a voice and find consensus. She gathered all opinions and never forced her own. She met with students, put them at ease, drew them out, and also helped them see other viewpoints. That was impressive. She just goes way above and beyond." As a result of this sometimes emotional process, there will be a single, inclusive event for all graduating seniors and their families starting with the 2016 graduating class.

Ms. Korotzer described her work on the senior event as particularly meaningful for her. "I'm proud of our community," she said. "These weren't easy conversations, but the way we were doing things was really hurting some kids. This community is willing to listen to kids and make changes to make their lives better."

Another example of Ms. Korotzer's commitment to Piedmont's youth is her current initiative to establish a Wall of Honor dedicated to Piedmont Unified's graduates who serve in the military, diplomatic corps, or other government service. The idea for a Wall of Honor emerged from conversations with Terisa Whitted, a Piedmont parent whose son enlisted in the Marines four years ago after graduating from PHS. Ms. Korotzer's son, TJ, enlisted in the Marines after graduating from PHS last June. Both women found that, in Piedmont, there is little awareness of the many paths young men and women may pursue through military and government service. They wanted to change that, and they wanted to promote awareness of the contributions and sacrifices of Piedmont Unified's graduates who serve the country.

Ms. Korotzer and Ms. Whitted were inspired by the renaming of the PHS Library in honor of Christopher Stevens -- a PHS graduate with a distinguished career in the U.S. Foreign Service, who served as U.S. Ambassador to Libya until his death in office in 2012. They began talking about possible ways to promote awareness of Piedmonters

who have served the country, starting with World War I and continuing through those in active service. They developed a proposal for an interactive display and historical database, and found enthusiastic support from many in the community. Working with the City and the Piedmont Historical Society, they identified individuals to include in this database. Working with PHS History teacher Courtney Goen, they enlisted students to research some of these individuals and write material for the database. They have cast a broad net, asking for all members of the community to contribute information and photographs. Although the research has just begun, they have already found information about a Piedmonter who won the prestigious Medal of Honor in 1943, and a Piedmonter who was the military's first female rear admiral.

Whitted said, "This project has grown beyond our wildest dreams and this would not have come together without Katie. She believes it is honorable to serve, and she wants to honor those who do. She also wants students to be aware of all these options for service. And she knows how to get things done and she's tenacious. My hat is off to her. She's like a special forces officer herself."

With characteristic humility, Ms. Korotzer reflected on her many significant contributions to kids and to the community by talking about the people she met and worked with because of her volunteer work, and the deep friendships that developed as a result.

"That's why winning an award feels weird. I made so many life-long friends. I got so much more than I gave," she said. "I enjoy working with lots of kinds of people, drawing people into the process, getting people to cooperate. To me, that's a worthy goal," she said.

The Board of Education will present Ms. Korotzer with the award and a gift of student art at the regularly scheduled Board of Education Meeting on May 11.