

Royal Oak Chamber honors community members

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Recipients of the Royal Oak Chamber of Commerce's Youth Achievement Award, Kate Martin, 16, left, and Mackenzie Martin, 14, both of Royal Oak, pose with their MK Blanket Wraps during the awards ceremony at the Hyatt Place, Royal Oak Oct. 22.

Photo by Donna Dalziel

caused her to lose her job, home and stability, Farhat said.

The race, which begins and ends at Starr Jaycee Park in Royal Oak, has raised more than \$350,000 to enact change. Nonprofits that benefit from the event include the University of Michigan Depression Center, KnowResolve and Common Ground.

Royal Oak Youth Assistance won the Community Spirit Award. Its mission statement, according to its website, is to "strengthen youth and families, and to reduce the incidence of delinquency, abuse and neglect through community involvement."

"They are all about giving kids in our community opportunities that aren't readily available to them, as far as kids who want to go to camp and things like a lot of kids might take for granted," Zeller said. "They're very involved."

For more information about Royal Oak Youth Assistance, visit www.royaloakyouthassistance.com or call (248) 546-8282.

ROYAL OAK — On Oct. 22, the Royal Oak Chamber of Commerce held its 2019 Community Awards at the Hyatt Place, Royal Oak.

Each year, the chamber presents awards to members of the community selected by its Community Awards Committee, as well as the Royal Oak Police Department, Royal Oak Fire Department and Royal Oak Schools.

"We had a full house. It was a great evening," said Heather Zeller, director of events for the chamber. "We haven't done (the award ceremony at the Hyatt Place) before. We try to move around and pick a new spot each year."

The awards are billed as recognition for leaders and organizations that go above and beyond to make life in Royal Oak fun, safe and special for everyone.

Royal Oak resident Julie Farhat, founder and executive director of Mind Over Matter, won the Citizen of the Year Award. Farhat and her siblings launched the Mind Over Matter 5K in 2006 to break the stigma surrounding the topics of mental illness and suicide after losing their mother, Gail Boledovich, to suicide May 1, 2005.

Despite giving her children a childhood full of laughter and joy, creative adventures and unconditional love, untreated schizophrenia eventually

Sisters Mackenzie and Kate Martin created MK Blanket Wraps, a local not-for-profit venture to create and distribute blanket wraps — functional pieces of clothing that hang around the wearer’s neck and include inside pockets — to those without homes.

The sisters have created hundreds of blanket wraps in their basement studio using donated fabric and sewing machines. They have also facilitated classes to teach homeless women how to sew the blanket wraps themselves.

Mackenzie and Kate Martin designed the pattern with help from their nanna after encountering a homeless man sitting on Woodward Avenue on a chilly fall day. They went home, made him a bagged lunch and then thought about how else they could help, they told the Royal Oak Review in a prior interview.

“(Their accomplishments are) amazing to me. They’re so well-spoken and such nice kids, and it was really a pleasure to have them there,” Zeller said. “They are great.”

Detective Bret Nelson, of the Royal Oak Police Department, received the Police Officer of the Year Award. Police Chief Corrigan O’Donohue said that Nelson handles his caseload with motivation, displays unparalleled investigative knowledge, smartly collaborates with other agencies and uses his time wisely.

“He readily helps those who seek his expertise, and is currently working a substantial caseload,” O’Donohue said. “He will soon bring to fruition a major case of theft and medical fraud involving multiple jurisdictions and hundreds of thousands of dollars of medical equipment.”

Other cases Nelson helped to solve, O’Donohue said, include an instance of identity and insurance fraud, a bank skimming case that involved an international criminal organization, and the conviction of a drug dealer who had supplied a fatal dose in an overdose case.

Sgt. Anthony Cattini, of the Royal Oak Fire Department, received the Firefighter of the Year Award. Assistant Fire Chief Jim Cook said the union votes to select which member of the department will receive the annual honor.

Cook said Cattini is a longtime member of the Fire Department and a Royal Oak resident who spends much of his time volunteering in the community and leading training initiatives.

Cattini regularly gives fire prevention talks in schools; helps coordinate the annual police versus fire hockey game; and brings the ladder truck to block parties, Detroit Zoo events, football games, parades, open houses, city events and more, Cook said.

“He does a lot of maintenance. He just redid the flooring at the station, and he just gives a lot to the department and really cares about the department and the city,” Cook said. “He does all this other stuff on his days off and works his regular shift.”



Royal Oak Schools Superintendent Mary Beth Fitzpatrick, left, embraces the district’s 2019 Elementary School Teacher of the Year, Kara Daunt, of Keller Elementary, during the awards ceremony.

Photo by Donna Dalziel

Royal Oak Schools teachers Kara Daunt, Karina Landis and Elizabeth Cusack each took home a Teacher of the Year Award. The three were each nominated by their peers.

Daunt, of Keller Elementary, is the district's 2019 Elementary School Teacher of the Year; Landis is the Middle School Teacher of the Year; and Cusick is the High School Teacher of the year.

Daunt is the International Baccalaureate coordinator and response to intervention teacher at Keller Elementary. Landis is the sixth grade math teacher and English-learning coordinator at Royal Oak Middle School. Cusick is a French and science teacher, leads the district's sixth through 12th grade science curriculum, and is cosponsor of the National Honor Society.

"Royal Oak is full of caring people and organizations; we love to celebrate that fact," Shelly Kemp, executive director of the chamber, said in a prepared statement. "The Community Awards remind us of all the good things happening through the commitment and thoughtful dedication of the people working quietly around us and choosing to make Royal Oak a better place to live, work and play."

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