



Christine Chubenko, vice chair of Royal Oak Youth Assistance, presents a Rising Star Award to Tristan Walker, a senior at Churchill Community High School, at the Royal Oak Elks Lodge April 22.  
Photo by Erin Sanchez

## Royal Oak Youth Assistance spotlights student achievements

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ROYAL OAK — On April 22, Royal Oak students, parents, educators and dignitaries gathered for the annual Royal Oak Youth Assistance awards at the Royal Oak Elks Lodge.

Christine Chubenko, vice chair of ROYA, distributed awards to students in kindergarten through 12th grade in two categories: Youth Recognition Awards, for those who go above and beyond, and Rising Star Awards, for those who have overcome adversity.

Chubenko highlighted one student in particular who received a Rising Star Award — Tristan Walker, a senior at Churchill Community High School. She said Walker was the first student from the alternative school to receive an award since ROYA began distributing awards approximately 30 years ago.

As a senior in 2018, Walker lost both his mother to cancer and his aunt, whom he was supposed to live with, resulting in a decline in his grades and him dropping out of school.

“He returned to Churchill and worked hard to earn those credits. He made the honor roll and will graduate in May,” Chubenko said. “He also gave a home to a kitten who really needed one.”

Youth Recognition Award elementary school student winners included Makayla Krause, Jenna Kanfer, Kate Stoffers and Tatum McKimmy, from Addams Elementary; Javier Rodriguez and Molly Anne Buckheim, from Oak Ridge Elementary; and Maryn Bitoff, from Keller Elementary.

Youth Recognition Award middle school winners included Kaylie McLemore, Summer Doris, Maggie Lynch, Natalie Pyciak and Atticus Brady.

Youth Recognition Award high school winners included Elizabeth Hahn, Will Mester, Keith Nemecek, Vera Plancarte, Brooke Blackwell, Timko Blyzniuk, Andrew Hendren, Maya Longe and Anna Wilner.

Rising Star Award elementary school winners included Zack Thornton, Vivian Smirnov and Juliette Girgenti, from Addams Elementary; Lola Lemon, Andy Allen and Dylan Galbraith, from Northwood Elementary; and David Peel, from Northwood Elementary.

All award winners received a trophy and a certificate.

Oakland County Board of Commissioners Chairman David Woodward said he enjoys attending the annual award ceremony and highlighting student leaders who are doing the right things.

“We recognize the contributions of amazing students in our schools,” Woodward said. “We are an incredible community, and we’re an incredible community because of the people that live here.”

Growing up in Royal Oak Schools, Woodward said his sixth grade teacher is now the assistant principal at Royal Oak Middle School, and the woman who got him into politics is now the principal of Northwood Elementary School.

“For me, it’s like coming home, because this is the community that raised me, and it’s a reminder of all of the contributions from not only the kids, but the entire community,” he said.

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



**Royal Oak High School seniors Keith Nemecek, left, and Will Mester, right, take a photo with state Rep. Jim Ellison after receiving a joint Youth Recognition Award from Royal Oak Youth Assistance at the Royal Oak Elks Lodge April 22.**

**Photo by Erin Sanchez**