

**Christine Fowler Mack**  
**Goodwill Employee of Distinction Remarks**  
**9-7-22**

Good afternoon, everyone.

*Good afternoon!*

It's more than a *good* afternoon—it's a *great* afternoon, if we are taking time out of our busy work days to recognize the shining stars among us!

Today, we honor staff members that have distinguished themselves in our organizations, and we celebrate the outstanding work being done throughout our beautiful city and across the region—work that stands out for its impact on the people we serve—work that makes a difference in our workplaces and in our communities.

Before I begin, please join me in thanking the Goodwill Corporation, along with the organizers and generous sponsors of the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Employee of Distinction Luncheon.

Thank you for this opportunity and for your own benevolent work in supporting children, families and others in Summit, Portage, Medina, Ashland and Richland Counties.

As Superintendent of Akron Public Schools, I am particularly grateful for the support that Goodwill provides for companies across our region to assist them in preparing for, finding and retaining employees in a workforce that many of the students in my district and in school districts across the region, will soon join.

What an honor it is for me to kick off this wonderful event, where we have an opportunity to recognize extraordinary work being done by ordinary people every day.

As I prepared my opening remarks, I marveled at the numerous areas of service represented by the nominees for these distinguished awards. And it was hard not to consider the depth and reach of the service so many of them deliver without any expectation of the awards they will receive today as Goodwill's 2022 Employees of Distinction.

Among the nominees are people who volunteer their time, and others who work long hours in areas that provide resources and safe harbor for the most vulnerable among us.

They manage crisis hotlines and shelters, and serve as counselors, therapists and advocates for those in need of assistance and support.

They provide skilled services to people of all ages, all abilities, disabilities and conditions, devoting their energies day-in and day-out in a life of service to others.

Lets give *all* of the nominees a round of applause and express our gratitude to those who noticed their work and sought recognition for it.

It's certainly an honor for me to see one of our own teachers recognized today, after having just honored her last May as our Akron Public Schools' Teacher of the Year.

Christine Justiss, a veteran science teacher at our National Inventors Hall of Fame STEM Middle School, is one of several recipients of the Employees of Distinction Award.

And I know that leaders of organizations scattered across this room will feel as proud as we do today to see such recognition bestowed on a stand-out employee on our staff.

All of us who lead companies and non-profit organizations do our best to attract and to retain the most talented, dedicated and highly-qualified applicants we can find.

And many of us are hard-pressed to know what sets even our best employees apart from those few whose service, work ethic, character, and performance stand out remarkably in ways that we are compelled not only to applaud and to recognize, but also to emulate.

All of us, no matter what title we have and regardless of the role we play in our work places, want to know that the work we do every day, and the lives we lead now and in the future, matters in some distinguishable way.

We are privileged to work in public education and in other areas of public service, and we know from our own experience, and from the selfless individuals with whom we work, that it is the *intrinsic* rewards of our work that are far more important to us than any *extrinsic* reward or recognition bestowed on us or on our honorees today.

I believe in my heart that all of us who work in public service do this work most of all, because it's here where we are needed most, and it's here where we can make the greatest difference in this world—one person at a time.

We live in a complex and increasingly uncertain world, where competing forces openly battle one another for power, profit, influence and standing, in some of the largest organizations and in some of the highest levels of public service.

Too often, we see individuals working to achieve personal gains, and they do so in ways that alienate, marginalize and disenfranchise others. Many of them exacerbate society's problems, rather than helping to solve them.

Unfortunately, a growth in that mindset over the last decade has made many in our society blind to the flagrant inequities and heart-breaking insecurities that the global pandemic laid bare.

With dire threats to people's survival, livelihood and dignity, the best among us remained on the front lines of our noble work.

In education, we scrambled overnight to support tens of thousands of digitally-disconnected families whose world went dark, while others flipped a switch on their computers to access their work, their schools, their physicians and the social service supports suddenly available only to those with access to a world-wide web that proved not to be worldwide at all.

In the workplaces represented by those in attendance today, threats to people's survival, livelihood and dignity proved that COVID-19 was much more than a health crisis in our communities.

The pandemic exposed glaring disparities and fundamental weaknesses in our social services, protection and preparedness that linger to this day.

But the COVID crisis did something else. It challenged the conscience of our communities to see the Internet as a public utility, every bit as essential as water, heat and electricity for *everyone* in the digital age.

It forced us to confront the limitations of existing paradigms and to replace them with new ones.

It led us to imagine new and better ways of service delivery that make our communities far more stable, responsive and inclusive than ever before.

Many of the people we recognize today were in positions that, for the people they serve, became a lifeline of hope and safe landing.

Some will be honored today for rethinking how we tackle pressing community challenges, or how we come together to address them.

Others will be recognized for their innovative strategies in protecting and empowering people, particularly those most disadvantaged.

Others, simply for the kind of compassionate, selfless service that through its own heart and spirit, attends to human suffering where it matters most—face-to-face.

It's hard not to wish the stories of service and courage that we will hear today aren't the stories we will see covered on the news channels, dominated mostly by election coverage and how DIS-united the United States of America is today.

But I'm an optimist at heart, and these are the stories that give me hope and that resonate most with me.

And I have to believe I am a lot like countless Americans who are inspired by service-oriented citizens who fulfill their pledge to create a system that works for all of us.

As the daughter of a local pastor in Akron, I was raised to believe that in every organization I work, that noble work ethic must apply—and it is our calling to create and to serve in organizations that work for everyone.

It's easy then, even in times of despair, to have hope, and even the midst of so much uncertainty, to hold up and celebrate the better angels among us—those who know that a life in public service does not include with it the luxury of waiting for someone else to make a difference.

We are compelled, instead, to roll up our sleeves and make that difference now.

And so, it feels good not only when we engage in noble work but also when we celebrate it, as we do today.

We love hearing stories of the best of our work and we will feel pride in all of the work, when each honoree is recognized today, because all of our work is connected.

Honorees: Today, we honor you, for distinguishing yourselves in the organizations you represent today.

I feel privileged to share this moment of joy with you, as all of us tune out the noise emanating from so much division around us, and focus instead on the far-stronger bond of unity that emanates from the quiet and important work these distinguished employees do each and every day.

Thank you.

Let's celebrate!