



2024 DELAWARE AWARD RECIPIENTS

DELAWARE EXCELLENCE AND COMMITMENT IN STATE SERVICE



Katelynn Cahall, Department of Transportation

Katelynn Cahall, a Paralegal II in the Division of Motor Vehicles Compliance and Investigations Unit, played a crucial role in assisting victims of dealership fraud despite significant staff turnover. She took on extensive responsibilities, including organizing case files, contacting financial institutions, and building detailed Excel workbooks to track consumer complaints. Her dedication ensured that over 80% of affected customers were able to title and register their vehicles, providing much-needed relief to frustrated consumers. Katelynn also became the primary point of contact for investigators, attorneys, and affected customers, earning praise for her professionalism and organizational skills. Her dedication to Delaware's customers makes her the example every leader wishes they had on their team.



The Instructional Materials and Resource Center Team: Allen Frazier, Anne Lattanzi, Kathie Oberholtzer, Avery Peterson, and Matthew Tseronis, Department of Health and Social Services

The Instructional Materials and Resource Center (IMRC) team supports visually impaired students in Delaware by providing accessible curricula in braille, digital, large print, and audio formats. Led by Matthew Tseronis, the team also runs the Men with a Message Program, training inmates as certified braille transcribers. Their production site at the Biggs Building processed over 700 textbooks for the 2023-2024 school year, with a 9% annual growth. Their efforts ensure that more than 300 students receive essential educational materials. The IMRC's dedication to accessibility and innovation has a profound statewide impact.

*"Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together."
Vincent van Gogh*

DELAWARE EXCELLENCE AND COMMITMENT IN STATE SERVICE



Sharay Knight, Court of Chancery

Sharay Knight has been an exceptional asset to the Court of Chancery during a time of staffing shortages and increased workload. She consistently goes above and beyond her duties, ensuring that the court operates smoothly and efficiently, even outside regular hours. Her professionalism, patience, and willingness to assist litigants and staff have earned her widespread praise, particularly for her help with court technology and her support of self-represented litigants. Sharay's efforts extend beyond her own responsibilities, as she has helped manage multiple dockets and court events, often traveling for extended periods to ensure the court's needs are met. Her dedication and proactive approach have been invaluable in helping the court continue its work amidst the challenges it faces.



Tina Wagner, Department of Health and Social Services

Tina Wagner, Volunteer Coordinator at Delaware Hospital for the Chronically Ill, enhances residents' experiences by organizing donations and coordinating volunteers. She uses community and social media platforms to gather support for events like the Resident Fall Ball and Family and Friends Day. Collaborating with local groups, she arranges entertainment and special activities. She also creates department store-like clothing selections and organizes luncheons, birthday gifts, and luxury experiences. Tina's warm demeanor and proactive approach foster a positive environment for residents.

"If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters. Excellence is not an exception, it is a prevailing attitude."

Collin Powell

DELAWARE EXCELLENCE AND COMMITMENT IN STATE SERVICE



Sherrie Downs, Micheala Vanderslice, and Kathleen Rees,
Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families

Three employees from the Department of Services for Children, Youth and their Families are outstanding examples of dedication, commitment, and skill in the service of ensuring the safety and well-being of the youth in our care.

Kathi Rees, a Family Crisis Therapist Supervisor with the Division of Family Services, goes above and beyond for Delaware's children. She leads the demanding 2nd shift in New Castle County and has provided statewide coverage for nearly a year – often working double shifts due to staffing shortages to ensure urgent cases are addressed. Kathi manages the Child Abuse and Neglect Report Line, supports her team through high-stress situations, and leads with compassion and dedication—playing a critical role in protecting vulnerable children and maintaining frontline operations statewide.

Family Crisis Therapists with the Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services, Micheala Vanderslice and Sherrie Downs exemplify teamwork, skillfully balancing authority and therapeutic care to support rehabilitative goals in secure care settings. Drawing on their frontline experience, they advocate for youth, engage families and provide essential guidance. Recently, they secured food, transportation, and educational resources for a distressed youth's family—going well beyond their job duties. Their dedication, flexibility, and creative problem-solving have earned them multiple recognitions. Micheala and Sherrie's strong partnership and commitment make them a true collaborative dream team.

*"All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance
and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence."*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

GEAR P3 TRAILBLAZER AWARD



Paul Huhn, Department of Transportation

Paul Huhn, an Engineer in the Division of Transportation Solutions, is being recognized for his extraordinary leadership in the emergency repair of the Trap Pond Dam Spillway following a critical failure and sinkhole formation. Through rapid mobilization, Lean principles, and cross-agency coordination, he completed the project in record time, saving the state hundreds of thousands of dollars. His structured approach included innovative design solutions, rigorous cost analysis, and transparent communication, ensuring efficiency without compromising quality. The project not only restored the dam's functionality but also set a best-practice model for future infrastructure emergencies. Paul's leadership and technical expertise demonstrated excellence in emergency response, fiscal responsibility, and engineering innovation.



Nicole Brown, Jacob Carey, Tina LaFace, Mallory Taylor, and Jillian Troumouhis, Department of Transportation

This team from the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) launched DELLA, an AI-powered chatbot, in June 2024 to enhance customer service by providing 24/7 access to essential information. Designed to streamline user interactions, DELLA reduces the need for multiple visits, phone calls, and emails by quickly answering questions through the DMV website. The chatbot's implementation has already led to a 50% usage rate, with over 258,000 engagements by the end of the year, improving efficiency and customer satisfaction. DMV staff continuously trains DELLA to recognize new search phrases, ensuring ongoing improvements and accurate responses. This innovative project has not only reduced costs by eliminating a third-party service but also set a precedent for other state agencies to implement similar AI solutions.

"Perfection is not attainable but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence."

Vince Lombardi

GOVERNOR'S TEAM EXCELLENCE | GEAR P3 INNOVATION AND EFFICIENCY AWARD



Combating Delaware's Teacher Shortage Team | Department of Education

This team from the Department of Education successfully implemented a statewide initiative to reduce the teacher shortage by increasing staffing, improving salaries, and strengthening career pathways. Through multiple work groups, they were able to partner with educators, advocacy groups, state agencies, and legislators to create a sustainable framework for continuous improvement. As a result of their efforts, new teacher recruitment and retention efforts have expanded, leading to increased participation in programs like Teacher Residencies, Registered Teacher Apprenticeships, and “Grow Your Own” initiatives. Their work on competitive salary initiatives and improved working conditions have led to a more attractive profession which contributed to a reduction in vacancy rates. Annual reporting and stakeholder engagement ensure that progress is tracked, and adjustments are made to maximize impact of their work. Overall, the team's efforts have strengthened Delaware's education workforce, improving stability and long-term student success.



Updated Retention Schedules Team | Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families

The DSCYF Updated Retention Schedules Team successfully updated the records retention schedule for the Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health Services, reducing storage time in alignment with industry standards. This initiative identified 900 boxes of business records eligible for destruction, resulting in a projected annual cost savings of \$540,000 for the State of Delaware. To date, over 400 boxes have been destroyed, already saving the state more than \$20,000 per month. The team collaborated with the Delaware Public Archives and the DSCYF Deputy Attorney General to implement these changes. Their work reflects lean thinking principles, optimizing state resources while maintaining compliance with best practices. The framework used by this team is now being applied to other DSCYF divisions, and its success has other State agencies looking to collaborate on similar projects. The Records Unit ensured smooth implementation by engaging records officers, assessing storage needs, and providing ongoing support to staff. This project exemplifies efficiency, fiscal accountability, and the proactive stewardship of state resources.

GOVERNOR'S TEAM EXCELLENCE | CHAMPIONS AWARD



Bridge Design Competition Team | Department of Transportation

Recognizing a decline in student interest in STEM fields, particularly engineering, and the growing challenge of hiring entry-level engineers, the DelDOT Bridge Design Team launched an annual bridge design competition in 2018. The competition, which began with just 10 teams, has grown exponentially, attracting 120 teams and over 600 attendees in 2024. As a result of their success, several schools have incorporated the event into their STEM curriculum or developed bridge design clubs, fostering long-term engagement with engineering concepts. The initiative has directly contributed to workforce development, with former participants securing internships and full-time engineering positions at DelDOT. The program's impact extends beyond the department, garnering industry-wide support and inspiring similar efforts in other states. Through innovation, collaboration, and dedication, the team has made a lasting impact on Delaware's engineering pipeline and STEM education.



Election Security Team

Department of Technology and Information, Delaware National Guard, and Department of Elections

The Election Security Team played a pivotal role in safeguarding Delaware's electoral process, demonstrating an unparalleled commitment to cybersecurity and democracy. Comprised of experts from the Department of Technology and Information, the Department of Elections, and the Delaware National Guard, this team worked tirelessly to identify, mitigate, and respond to cyber threats that could compromise election integrity. By leveraging intelligence sharing, interagency collaboration, and real-time threat monitoring, they significantly reduced vulnerabilities from hundreds of thousands to only a few hundred that could be effectively managed and neutralized. Their ability to rapidly detect and respond to potential attacks, reducing reaction time from days to minutes, ensured the integrity and public trust in the election process. This unprecedented collaboration has set a national example, with other states looking to Delaware's model for securing elections. The team's relentless dedication, strategic planning, and innovative use of resources exemplify the highest standards of excellence in public service.

GOVERNOR'S TEAM EXCELLENCE | CHAMPIONS AWARD



Division of Communications Team | Department of Safety and Homeland Security

This team from the Division of Communications demonstrated exceptional teamwork and technical expertise in relocating and upgrading the State's critical 800 MHz communication system while ensuring uninterrupted service for First Responders. Despite challenges such as aging equipment, a short relocation timeline, and staff turnover, the team executed a seamless transition in just over eight hours. Their proactive planning, including rewiring systems and prioritizing GPS synchronization, minimized downtime and maintained system reliability with less than one percent downtime. Additionally, the team trained new staff on both legacy and modern technologies, ensuring a sustainable workforce while saving the state thousands of dollars. Their success serves as a model for future relocations and highlights their vital role in maintaining 24/7 public safety communications.

"The pursuit of excellence with unrestrained passion can lead to the accomplishment of wonders with unsurpassed joy."

Aberjhani

AWARD FOR HEROISM



Nicholas Geannakakes, Delaware State Police

On March 5, 2024, Cpl. Geannakakes responded to a call in Seaford about three dogs attacking a man in his front yard. Upon arrival, he found the victim suffering serious head and leg injuries as the dogs continued circling and attacking him. The dogs' owner was present but stated he could not control them. As Cpl. Geannakakes exited his vehicle, the aggressive dogs approached him. Maintaining his composure, he retrieved his trauma pack and ordered the owner to back away.

Seeing the victim bleeding profusely, Cpl. Geannakakes shielded him from the dogs, during which he was bitten on the right calf. Despite the injury, he bravely maintained his position, ultimately shooting one of the attacking dogs, causing all three to flee. The victim, barely able to speak, expressed concern for his children inside the home, not wanting them to see him die.

Cpl. Geannakakes calmly reassured the victim that he and his children were safe, assessed his injuries, and applied a tourniquet to his leg. He remained with the victim, providing comfort and lifesaving aid until EMS arrived. Cpl. Geannakakes' selfless actions directly stopped the attack and saved the victim's life.



Lauren Tulloch, Yvonne Dickerson, Cressa Vines, Kelley Diem, and David Cross, Department of Transportation

On October 30, 2024, collector Cressa Vines was in lane 1 when a customer pulled up and asked for emergency service to be called because they were having heart attack symptoms. Cressa stayed calm, called the office to speak to Sgt. Tulloch and informed her of the situation. Sgt. Tulloch called 911 and then proceeded to the lane to assist until 911 arrived. Cpl. Dickerson stayed in the office to keep an eye on the situation from inside the control center and pulled collector Kelly Diem in to assist. David Cross who was in the lane next to Cressa, overheard what was going on and had also called 911 as well. Sgt Tulloch and collectors Cross and Vines waited with the customer to try to keep him calm. These employees remained calm and vigilant in a stressful situation. They all played a key role, and all deserve to be recognized for their heroism.

AWARD FOR HEROISM



Jennifer Gabriele, Department of State

In April of 2024, a team member of the Delaware Veterans Cemetery experienced a medical emergency while onsite and on the job. Jennifer Gabriele displayed the utmost in courage and her dedication to the welfare of those around her by administering life-saving measures in an attempt to save this employee's life. Her efforts, though unsuccessful, were unwaivering and continuous until the first responders arrived to take over.

In the aftermath of this trauma, Jennifer demonstrated care and concern for everyone as she worked with the team to honor the deceased by focusing on continuity of the team's mission – provide dignified and compassionate burials for our Veterans.

This event was the first of two impactful losses at the Delaware Veterans Cemetery in 2024. Jennifer's compassion and leadership was significant to helping the entire team move forward through these difficult circumstances.

*"True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic.
It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost,
but the urge to serve others at whatever cost."*

Arthur Ashe
