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School Nutrition Employees Win State and Regional Honors

HOUSTON COUNTY, GA – The Houston County School Nutrition Program is proud to have two team members win state awards from the Georgia School Nutrition Association. Wanda Keene, Northside High manager, was named the 2021 Georgia School Nutrition Association Manager of the Year. Jennifer Graham, Matt Arthur Elementary food assistant, won the 2021 Georgia Employee of the Year. Graham was also named the Employee of the Year by the national School Nutrition Association for the Southeast Region, which covers six states.



Keene, pictured left, is a fixture in the School Nutrition Program (SNP), her school and community. She has served as a manager for the past 19 years. During the school year, she leads her kitchen team in feeding Northside's students, day in and day out. A proud Eagle, she answers her office phone with comments about state football championships. Students respond well to her firm, caring leadership and depend on her for consistent, reliable guidance in a world that can overwhelm young adults. During the summer, Keene operates large-scale production for the district's Summer Feeding Program. She reaches out to community sites, signs them up to participate, and oversees van routes for neighborhood delivery. Keene also serves as a SNP training manager, and when schools closed due to COVID-19, she helped coordinate new meal services. For her, that first day was just another day; she gathered her group and said, "This is what we do. We feed kids." It was short, it was simple, but most importantly, it was inspiring. Her COVID-19 efforts earned her a spot on last summer's list of 25 K-12 foodservice heroes created by *Food Management Magazine*.



Jennifer Graham, pictured right, has a reputation as a hard worker and especially shines during promotional events. For example, Graham radiates enthusiasm during fair week. She creates food stand signage just like that at the fair and even dons a hot dog costume. During Star Wars week, she dressed in a C-3PO costume and was the talk of the school. Graham readily offered to work when schools shut down in March 2020, beginning drive-thru service on March 17 with a St. Patrick's Day theme. Every week thereafter was a new theme, including a grass skirt over her uniform and a sign reading, "'Ohana' means family. We truly miss our school family." Graham

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paired bumblebee costumes with greeting signs reading, "It's a BEEutiful day to see you," and elephant ears meant the sign read, "An elephant never forgets, and we will never forget you." During drive-thru services, her enthusiasm was contagious. Her positive attitude affected so many families that she was also recognized on last summer's list of *Food Management Magazine's* 25 K-12 foodservice heroes. Graham shows that same enthusiasm and positive attitude every day, brightening the lives of those around her.

"Employees like Wanda and Jennifer inspire every member of our school nutrition team to do our very best," said Meredith Potter, Director of School Nutrition. "Their contagious enthusiasm and love of children remind all of us why we are a part of this profession!"

For more information, please contact Potter at Meredith.Potter@hcbe.net or 478-322-3308.

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