



## **2025 Employee Excellence Awards**

### **Office of the Manager, Communications and Organizational Development**

**Date:** Tuesday, March 4, 2025

**RE:** Recipients of the 2025 Employee Excellence Awards

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#### **Winners**

#### **Teamwork Award: Sue Vidinovski**

Sue Vidinovski works in the Human Resources Department as a Human Resources Assistant. She has shown a consistent commitment to collaboration, support, and fostering a positive team environment across the organization. She is approachable, responsive, and always willing to support her colleagues. She brings an upbeat, energetic attitude and a genuine willingness to help, making her a trusted and valued team member for staff across the organization.

What truly sets Sue apart is her reliability and her “yes” mindset. She is someone her teammates can count on, whether it’s stepping in to support a colleague, responding promptly to questions, or taking on additional tasks to ensure the team’s work continues smoothly. Her positive attitude and calm presence help bring people together, especially in busy or challenging situations, and her collaborative approach strengthens trust within the team.

Sue’s team spirit also extends beyond her core role. She generously shares her time and energy by teaching fitness classes at County events such as the Outdoor Accessibility Fest-for-All, helping to build connection, wellness, and morale among employees. These efforts contribute to a stronger, more engaged workplace and reflect Sue’s commitment to the collective well-being of her colleagues.

Through her dependability, positivity, and genuine care for others, Sue consistently strengthens teamwork and fosters a supportive, inclusive workplace. She embodies the spirit of the Team Spirit Award and sets a strong example of how collaboration and unity contribute to shared success.

## **Innovation Award: Jay Gilchrist**

Jay Gilchrist is a Network Administrator with the Information Technology Department. He consistently delivers creative solutions, improvements and ideas to drive progress and enhance County of Essex operations.

During the long-awaited M365 rollout, Jay found a way to reduce the amount of downtime for the cutover of the mailboxes. The first phase of the project had over 1,600 person-hours. During the initial phases, the data was migrated and the mailboxes were immediately cutover. The migration timeline was unpredictable, leading to many late-night and early-morning hours.

Jay and the team discovered an efficient way to migrate much of the data and reduce the cutover time to 20 minutes in the evening. This method saved significant time, shortening the project timeline and enabling the team to support employees during regular working hours. Jay's work played a key role in helping deliver M365.

## **Service Excellence Award: Cat Griffin**

Cat Griffin is the Communications Coordinator for the Essex-Windsor Solid Waste Authority. Cat gives everything she has when she comes to work every day. Her passion for communications and her dedication to producing a high-quality product are unmatched.

Cat has shown this level of commitment since June 17, 1993, and is EWSWA's longest serving team member. She consistently makes herself available to ensure an emergency or urgent deadline is met, even if it means stepping in for another team member who is not available.

Through her colourful communication skills, Cat shaped how we look as an organization and how residents and partners perceive EWSWA and environmental stewardship. She pioneered extensive, impactful regional initiatives like the Blue Box recycling program, the municipal collection calendar, EWSWA's Garden Gold Compost, and, of course, the Green Bin Program. Her expertise not only helped build these programs but sustained them, protecting the environment and extending the life of our regional landfill.

Cat has also been the face of EWSWA's municipal collection calendars for decades, working collaboratively with municipal staff across all local municipalities. Her ability to unite diverse teams, gather accurate information, and communicate clearly has produced a trusted, region-wide tool that residents rely on year after year.

While Cat is widely known for her professionalism, it is her passion that people remember most – her passion for the environment, for her work, and for people. This gentle but powerful passion has created longstanding partnerships and friendships and has convinced even the most “non-waste” people that waste diversion is fun, impactful, and cool.

Above all, Cat’s dedication to her teammates, always being available, always supporting others, and always showing up as a genuinely good human, will leave a lasting effect on everyone fortunate enough to have worked alongside her.

### **Empowerment Award: Jeanie Diamond-Francis**

Jeanie Diamond-Francis is the Manager of Community Services with the Health and Community Services Department. Jeanie advocates tirelessly for the vulnerable in our community and the members of her staff on her small but mighty team. She manages one of the most challenging portfolios yet comes to work every day with a smile on her face and a “can do attitude.”

Without Jeanie and her relentless advocacy, the County likely would not have an Affordable Housing Strategy, there would be no Homelessness Hub in the County, and certainly no overnight program to keep the most vulnerable warm this winter. Jeanie has put considerable time and effort into establishing and supporting these programs. She addresses complaints and concerns related to these programs in an incredibly professional, kind and thoughtful manner, always thinking about what is best for the members of the community that need these programs and how she can help them more. She and her team do important, challenging work and deliver exceptional service every day.

Jeanie’s support of the Homelessness Hub and overnight program were on full display when the program was almost shut down because of an issue with the fire plan. Jeanie moved mountains to make sure a fire plan was developed and approved in time to ensure there was no interruption to the program. This was not her area of expertise, but she found the resources she needed and got the job done. Her team has witnessed her embracing similar innovations over the years, and it has inspired them in turn to come up with creative solutions to complex problems.

Finally, Jeanie is the County’s face in all its interactions with the not-for-profit sector that is involved in providing services to those experiencing homelessness. The County hears from that sector repeatedly about what a pleasure it is to work with Jeanie. She is always willing to collaborate, and her efforts positively showcase the County.

The work Jeanie and her team perform is incredibly time-consuming, frustrating, and often thankless. Despite that, Jeanie continues to perform her work to the highest standard, encourages her staff to do the same, and comes to work with a smile on her face and a positive attitude that is infectious to those around her. She impresses and inspires everyone with whom she interacts.

## **Honourable Mentions**

### **Team Spirit Award Honourable Mentions:**

#### **Kris Kretschmann**

Kris Kretschmann is the Lead Inspector with the Infrastructure and Planning Department and has been a tremendous team player for many years. His ability to coordinate engineering staff, contractors, and roads crews is no small feat. With so many variables in a construction project Kris is able to gather all parties involved and keep the train on the tracks. His communication with the roads department keeps us involved and we appreciate the advance notice to line up services he needs to make the project run smoothly. Whether it is sign replacements, line painting or shouldering operations, Kris is always keeping the team unified.

#### **Mary Lou Beneteau**

Mary Lou Beneteau recently retired as a Paramedic from Essex-Windsor EMS after 37 years of service. She was always a positive presence in the workplace and set an exemplary example for front-line staff. She always put tremendous effort into organizing social activities outside of work that boosted the morale of her colleagues, making them a more cohesive and united team at work.

#### **Decio Barbosa**

Decio Barbosa is a Personal Support Worker at Sun Parlor Home who consistently demonstrates excellence through his positive attitude and dedication to safety. He always greets others with a smile and a pleasant demeanor, creating a welcoming environment for staff and residents alike.

Decio has been instrumental in maintaining safety across the home, frequently going above and beyond by putting in extra hours to ensure snow removal is completed promptly and thoroughly. His commitment, reliability, and care for others truly reflect the spirit of employee excellence.

Decio continues to go above and beyond expectations by demonstrating leadership as one of the home's union representatives, health and safety representatives. He volunteers for additional duties without any expectation of recognition or requirement to do so.

### **Colleen Neumiller**

Colleen Neumiller has been a Resource Assistant with the Essex County Library since 2010 and has led exceptional transformative collaborations within her team and the communities she serves. In 2022, Colleen was instrumental in developing and executing plans for a new children's section renovation at the Harrow branch, with \$15,000 in funding from the Harrow Health and Wellness Foundation. The result has transformed the branch's children's section into one of most beautiful and well-visited in the County.

After moving to her current position in Kingsville, Colleen has spearheaded collaborations with Erie Migration District School, including the organization of an annual teen art contest in the branch's teens section, which she helped develop. Colleen was also instrumental in forming a collaboration with the Kingsville Rotary, which recently awarded the branch a grant to expand the branch's children's section. Within the library, Colleen is an enduring force for unity and teamwork. Through her cheerfulness, positivity, and goal-oriented work, she organizes her coworkers into collaborative groups that set the standard for Essex County Library branch achievements.

### **Innovation Award Honourable Mentions:**

#### **Jay Herbert**

Jay Herbert is an Inspector with the Infrastructure and Planning Department who brings many years of valuable experience to the table when it comes to the County road network. On County Road 50, when faced with hydro and drainage conflicts as well as limited available road platform, Jay was able to develop and implement a realignment initiative that saved the County thousands of dollars. By shifting the centreline of the road, he was able to complete a design that included paved shoulders without the need for costly hydro relocation and drain enclosure. His commitment to this initiative continued through the construction phase of the project as he worked with the contractor to confirm the layout and verify the rideability. As the County moves through additional phases of pavement rehabilitation on County Road 50, Jay continues to lead the design initiative, ensuring continuity between sections of roadway and paved shoulders.

## **George Shkreli**

George Shkreli is an Advanced Care Paramedic with Essex-Windsor EMS who is always looking for ways to improve the service by playing a key role in numerous departments. He is a part of the FTO team, peer mentorship, a preceptor, and also part of the Windsor Police joint training initiative. George has brought forward suggestions and research on pelvic binders, which have been successfully placed in all trucks. George is very well-respected by all peers and is constantly striving to improve our service.

## **Shannon Chaput**

Shannon Chaput is a Life Enrichment Worker at Sun Parlor Home who consistently demonstrates outstanding teamwork and organization skills. She continually works with a mindset of service excellence for both residents and team members, genuinely enjoying her role and striving to be the best at recreation delivery. Shannon's dedication and "helping spirit" shine through in many specific actions and projects. Her work is characterized by proactive solutions and a focus on enriching the lives of residents and supporting her colleagues.

As a member of the BSO Internal Champion team, she observes residents and helps team members manage challenging behaviors. A notable example involved creating a personalized farming book for a resident to relate to during difficult days. Shannon implemented a quiet time intervention for the neighbourhood she serves that not only supports residents but helps staff to be grounded and present with quiet music and soothing sounds at shift change.

Shannon's efforts are highlighted in many ways, but a few key moments are noted below that exemplify who she is and how she shows up every day.

Building and designing the Tim Horton's drive-through replica at the annual Car Show for residents, bringing a comforting experience to residents who would otherwise be unable to enjoy.

Creating LE-themed Halloween costumes for the entire team despite being away from the home for her own personal matters and at her own cost.

Shannon provides support through her positive, can-do attitude, thinking outside the box, being the first to volunteer for activities that are outside of her responsibilities, such as picking up birthday cakes for residents and providing additional support to her colleagues. Truly, she is an individual who goes above and beyond.

## **Tom Paquette**

Tom Paquette, a Labourer 2 at the Essex-Windsor Solid Waste Authority's Regional Landfill, brings an exceptional blend of creativity, technical ability, and hands-on problem-solving to the organization. His reputation as the Authority's "jack of all trades" is well earned, particularly through his pivotal role in addressing a major leachate management challenge.

When the development of a reverse osmosis (RO) pilot system required innovative design, underground infrastructure planning, and non-traditional solutions, Tom stepped forward as a key creative force. From the system's arrival in January 2024, he absorbed complex technical details from the manufacturer and applied them with remarkable ingenuity, troubleshooting unexpected issues and ensuring the system performed at a high level.

Nearly two years into operation, the success of Ontario's first RO leachate treatment plant reflects Tom's commitment, adaptability, and forward-thinking approach. His leadership has helped position the Authority to pursue a permanent facility capable of directly discharging treated water, an advancement with significant long-term environmental benefits. Tom's contributions exemplify true innovation: reimagining possibilities, refining processes, and developing better ways to protect and enhance operations.

## **Service Excellence Award Honourable Mentions:**

### **Michel Clifford**

Michel Clifford is Administrative Assistant, Roads, in the Infrastructure and Planning Department. She has the uncanny ability to multitask with many different people, pulling her in many different directions and doing it all with a smile on her face. Her ability to stay calm and pleasant with residents who aren't always kind is incredible and her desire to give every resident the time to voice their opinions, questions, concerns is unmatched. With transitioning leadership at the roads department, Michel has been extremely patient and kind. She starts each day with a positive attitude, lifting up the entire department.

### **Jackie Demers**

Jackie Demers is a Scheduling Clerk with Essex-Windsor EMS and has been a dedicated employee for more than 20 years. She is always willing to go above and beyond to complete tasks on time with accuracy and efficiency. She is always willing to jump in when help is required in other areas of the office and is the office go-to for questions about scheduling practices. Jackie works with her team to review practices and comes up with progressive

solutions to problems. She is always thinking of creative ways to assist employees with their requests. The team could not manage without her knowledge and expertise. Jackie also supports her union co-workers by being a point of reference for the union executive when they are dealing with scheduling-related questions, always providing an unbiased response and facts to questions asked.

### **Chris Fenton**

Chris Fenton is an Information Services Clerk who does exemplary work when it comes to the processing and distribution of library materials. While largely behind the scenes, Chris' role is critical to ensuring library materials move efficiently and reliably throughout the system. Through attention to detail, a strong work ethic, and a commitment to keeping library materials circulating, Chris helps ensure that books and other materials are processed accurately and delivered to branches without delay. Her efforts directly support front-line staff and ensure patrons across the County have timely access to the materials they request. Chris plays a vital role in keeping the library system running smoothly. Her dedication exemplifies service excellence by supporting access to materials, reducing waiting times, and strengthening the overall library experience for both staff and the community.

### **Susan Fast**

Susan Fast is a Food Service Worker at Sun Parlor Home who consistently steps forward with compassion, grace and genuine care during deeply emotional moments like saying goodbye to a cherished resident.

While it is not typical for Food Service Workers to provide care during those final moments, Susan takes time away from her own young family to volunteer at Sun Parlor Home to simply "be with" individuals and provide a familiar face and gentle touch during those final vulnerable moments of life. Susan takes it upon herself to sit with residents who are palliative and in the final stages of life, offering comfort, presence, and peace. When family members are unable to be there, especially during late-night hours, Susan ensures the resident is never alone.

Susan's selflessness, dedication, and compassion go far beyond her role. Her actions bring dignity and comfort to residents and reassurance to families, and they truly do not go unnoticed.

## **Trisha Hedge**

Trisha Hedge is a Clerk Bookkeeper with the Financial Services Team who consistently delivers exceptional service and goes above and beyond to support both internal and external stakeholders. She consistently steps up to train and support others, ensuring work is completed accurately, efficiently, and with confidence. A clear example of this is her hands-on support with Accounts Payable, where she pleasantly assists colleagues, shares her knowledge, and helps troubleshoot issues to keep processes running smoothly.

Trisha demonstrates a high level of personal growth and accountability in her role. She actively seeks opportunities to expand her skill set, including taking on additional responsibilities such as credit card processing, and approaches these tasks with care and professionalism. Her commitment to continuous improvement is evident in her proactive efforts to identify process improvements, work transparently, and take full ownership of her responsibilities.

Progressive in her approach to learning, Trisha readily embraces new systems and ways of working and quickly translates that knowledge into meaningful value for the team. She is generous with her time and expertise, consistently training and supporting her peers to ensure shared understanding, consistency, and success across the organization.

Through her reliability, initiative, and commitment to continuous improvement, Trisha consistently enhances the experience of those she supports. Her dedication to excellence, her strong work ethic, and her service-oriented mindset are impressive.

## **Empowerment Award Honourable Mentions:**

### **Don Kraynack**

Don Kraynack is a Supervisor, Roads Maintenance, with the Infrastructure and Planning Department. His years of experience and wealth of knowledge make him extremely versatile to not only perform his job, but to uplift and inspire those around him. He is a tremendous resource who will be sorely missed one day. With a much younger workforce than in the past, Don has mentored and empowered younger operators and lead hands to be creative and voice opinions to get jobs done. He has also been a calming force in the supervisor's office when times get stressful.

## **John Conlon**

John Conlon is a District Chief with Essex-Windsor EMS who consistently supports, guides and empowers Paramedics at all levels of the service.

As an Advanced Care Paramedic with 12 years of experience and six years in the District Chief role, John fosters confidence and autonomy by providing clear guidance while trusting crews to make sound decisions in challenging situations. He is consistently approachable and responsive, whether addressing simple questions or complex operational issues, ensuring staff feel supported rather than micromanaged.

Through his leadership, mentorship, and problem-solving approach, John empowers paramedics to perform at their best, even during periods of extreme system pressure such as Code Red and Code Black conditions.

## **Allan King**

Allan King, a retired Leamington police officer, has worked as a delivery driver/handyperson at the Essex County Library since 2003. Over 23 years, Allan has carried out his duties with consistent excellence. In recent years, Allan has taken an informal leadership position in the drivers' department. In 2024, he volunteered to join a Job Hazard Analysis Committee with others in the library and County to assess ways in which the health and safety of the drivers' department could be improved. His contributions led to many positive changes. He has also served as a mentor to several new hires in the department, demonstrating best practices and making them feel a welcome part of the team.