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For immediate release

Coworker's nomination surprises Jenkins with state association's top honor

Jennifer Jenkins almost missed her big moment.

After three hours in the car followed by an afternoon packed with educational sessions at the annual Minnesota Financial Workers/Case Aide Association conference in October, Jenkins nearly headed to her room for some well-deserved rest. Thankfully, she stayed put.

At the evening's dinner, she was stunned to hear "Jennifer Jenkins" called as the association's Financial Worker/Case Aide of the Year, and immediately thought that she and someone else in the room shared the same name.

"I had no clue," says Jenkins, who's worked for Rice County Social Services Financial Eligibility Unit since April 2018. After the immediate shock wore off, Jenkins was hit by a wave of emotion. "I was so humbled by the nomination and appreciative of the recognition."

Jenkins' boss, Financial Assistance Supervisor Jerry Paschke, believes it's the first time a Rice County financial worker has received the award. And he, like nominator Eligibility Worker Angela Owens, believe it's well deserved.

Jenkins not only mentored Owens, who joined the county in February, she reserved conference room space and spent days sitting alongside Owens, watching her go through different types of case, ensuring she took good notes; asking her questions about the different programs, policies, procedures and ever-changing state rules and regulations, so she could solo when the time came. All while doing her own work.

Paschke says Owens isn't the first coworker Jenkins has mentored in that way, and is grateful that as a new supervisor she stepped up and took some of the pressure off of him.

While that extra assistance is outside her job description, Jenkins doesn't see it as extraordinary, saying she was just doing her part to help during staffing shortages and paying forward what had been done for her by co-workers, mentors and supervisors.

"We're a team," says Jenkins. "If I see someone struggling, how do I not help them? We all step up in order to succeed as a team."

Paschke says Jenkins is hard wired to help others, noting that she was a trainer and had written procedures prior to coming to Rice County.

While she's had a number of roles within the unit, Jenkins currently serves adults deemed blind or disabled with long term care, housing support services, and other benefit needs.



Jennifer Jenkins, named the Minnesota Financial Worker/Case Aide of the Year, says it's her entire team that deserves the honor. (Rice County photo)

Owens, in her nomination, explained that Jenkins is also a role model and finds that there's a real spirit of camaraderie in the Financial Unit, making the new county employee feel "welcome, wanted and supported."

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