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2020 and 2021 Golden Acorn Employer of the Year Award Winners Announced

Employer Appreciation and Workforce Development

For Immediate Release

NEW BRITAIN, CT – November 22, 2021

The Charter Oak State College Foundation announces **Winners** of the **Golden Acorn Employer of the Year Award for 2020 and 2021**. Employers were honored at the Foundation's **Annual Employer Appreciation Breakfast** held on Thursday, November 18, 2021 at the TPC River Highlands in Cromwell.

2020 Golden Acorn Employer of the Year winner, **Russ Arnold, Director of Public Works/Town Engineer for the Town of Farmington**; nominated by David Parent, 2021 COSC Graduate.

2021 Golden Acorn Employer of the Year winners include: **Stephen Clark, Newington Police Chief**; nominated by Henry Rodriguez, COSC student; **and Svitlanna Czernee, Nadia Marynovych, and Kristen Bodenstein, The Goddard School of Westport**; nominated by Nicole Vezina, COSC student.

Photos of award winners and a list of all fifty-two nominees are attached.

Employer nominees were from a wide range of industries and services across Connecticut and other states. They were selected by Charter Oak State College students and alumni in the fields of Public Safety, Early Childhood Education, Nursing and Health Care, Business, Paralegal, and Information Systems Studies representing many of the certificate and degree programs offered at the college.

Held annually, Charter Oak alumni and students are encouraged to bring their boss to breakfast – for free, and to nominate their boss for the **Golden Acorn Employer of the Year Award**. Founder of the Employer Appreciation Breakfast, Dave Calibey, COSC Foundation Board member and **Big Think** Principle explains, "We recognize that it is the employer that helps our adult students earn a living and expand their career opportunities – and for that the student (and we) are grateful. This year the Foundation honored the employers from both 2020 and 2021."

"Charter Oak State College is dedicated to preparing our adult students for their next job. We sponsor an employer's breakfast to celebrate the supervisors and the companies that support our students. This event is a labor of love for us," **Ed Klonoski, President, COSC**.

In nominating **2020 winner Russ Arnold**, David Parent, 2021 COSC Graduate, stated "The reason is as simple as **they CARE** for their employees and treat them better than I have seen any boss treat their employees. For example, during the pandemic when we had many issues some personal in nature and very intense, the boss handled these situations with the employees top of mind. From providing grief counselors at a moment notice during a crisis, ensuring paid time off was available to a new hire, and just providing remarkable

support to all affected (and infected) by COVID. All of this AND my boss and the Town fully supports and recommends higher education training for every employee. Employees can sign up for higher education to improve their career, and some course work can be completed "on the clock". As employees – we are encouraged to strive to be better, through higher education. **Any individual should consider themselves lucky to have Russ Arnold as a Boss and work for the Town of Farmington, I know I do!"**

Carol Hall, Executive Director of the Charter Oak State College Foundation noted "that many of the 2021 nominations included appreciation to individuals from many organizations that worked to maintain a sense of normalcy during the pandemic year. Front line workers. To choose just one was almost impossible, so we chose two!"

The two **2021 Golden Acorn Employer of the Year Winners**

- **Stephen Clark, Newington Police Chief**; nominated by Henry Rodriguez, COSC student.
- **Svitlanna Czernee, Nadia Marynovych, and Kristen Bodenstein, The Goddard School of Westport**; nominated by Nicole Vezina, COSC student.

Stephen Clark, Newington Police Chief. Sergeant Henry Rodriguez, COSC student, noted that **2021 winner of the Golden Acorn Employer award Stephen Clark, Newington Chief of Police**, "has been a member of the Connecticut law enforcement community for over 25 years. He earned a master's degree in Criminal Justice from Central Connecticut State University and understands and values the significance of an education. I approached my chief in 2018 and requested his endorsement to pursue a degree in Public Safety Administration through Charter Oak State College. Since then, he has supported, promoted, and encouraged my journey with Charter Oak State College. He also established a standard at my agency that higher learning and training is essential for a successful career. In 2019, I was promoted to the rank of Sergeant, a frontline police supervisor. I am honored and grateful for the continued support. **I have nominated (him) because I strongly believe his character, leadership, and commitment to the community as well as his officer's continuance of higher learning has demonstrated that Chief Clark is more than commendable to be awarded the 2021 Golden Acorn Employer of the Year Award."**

Photo # 1 – Chief Stephen Clark, shown here accepting his award with **Henry Rodriguez** and **Carol Hall**, Executive Director, COSC Foundation, stated "I am grateful for this award, for Henry nominating me, and for the Foundation's selection. The Police Department operates as a first responder to emergency calls, and as you can imagine at the onset of the pandemic, we were called to an extraordinary number of medical emergencies. Being recognized in this manner – and appreciated – is a very humbling experience. Thank you." (From Left: Sergeant Henry Rodriguez, Carol Hall, and Stephen Clark, Newington Police Chief).

Photo #2 – Chief Stephen Clark shaking hands with **Rebeka Scalia**, COSC Foundation Chairman (Foreground); **Sergeant Henry Rodriguez** and **Susan Lewis**, Director at Balchem Corporation and COSC Foundation Board Member (Background).

Svitlanna Czernee, Nadia Marynovych, and Kristen Bodenstein from **The Goddard School of Westport** are all **2021 winners of the Golden Acorn Employer award**. According to Nicole Vezina, COSC student, "These incredible women have supported my educational and professional journey since I started. Supporting me through the pandemic to help fulfill my requirements to complete my associate's and certificate in early childcare education. They made it possible for me to meet my student teaching requirements when it seemed impossible with schools closed all around us. These ladies have helped to transform my mistakes into learning – into new skills that has shaped my education and career path. From their words of encouragement to accommodations for my educational needs, they have taught me that a great support system can go a long way. I am beyond appreciative of everything they have done for me. Despite the challenges they face

regarding short staffing and the Covid19 pandemic, these women have still gone out of their way to ensure that my education was and is a priority. My sincere gratitude and thank you!”

Photo # 3 – Nadia (Director), **Nicole** (Teacher/Student), **Svitlana** (Asst. Director) & **Kristen** (Owner) The Goddard School of Westport (From Left to Right). Nadia, Svitlana and Kristen were unable to attend the EAB.

The Employer Appreciation Breakfast brings our students, alumni, and business leaders together to celebrate employers that support higher education and to raise funds for degree completion. This year, proceeds from the event will support Higher Education Equity through a new Charter Oak State College scholarship program, **Parents Intent on Improving Tomorrow (PiiT)**. The PiiT program is an intentional resource aimed at removing barriers to higher education degree completion with the intent of helping to ease economic and racial disparity for our student parents of color.

Glenn Davis, COSC Foundation Treasurer and First Vice President, Community Development/CRA Officer at Liberty Bank, said “We are excited to announce the BIG news for our parent students – those living at or near poverty – and especially our parents of color. Liberty Bank has extended a matching Challenge! **They not only provided the initial resources for our PiiT program, Liberty Bank is also excited to award an additional \$4,000 to the Parents Intent on Improving Tomorrow (PiiT) program.** By working together with our teammates, customers and communities, Liberty Bank continues to reinforce the importance of fostering and maintaining an environment that makes everyone feel welcomed, appreciated, valued and celebrated. As we work to build *the* Community Bank of the Future, we are committed to making key investments in organizations, programs, partnerships, and activities focused on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I).”

Between pledges and donations, the event raised an additional \$4,550; the Employer Appreciation guests, board members, friends of Charter Oak, and the COSC staff met the match challenge! Donations are still being accepted for the PiiT Program at the link provided (<https://bit.ly/PiiTFund>).

Photo # 4 - Glenn Davis, COSC Foundation Treasurer and First Vice President, Community Development/CRA Officer at Liberty Bank, and EAB Chair (Center); **Dawn Ferry**, VP, Manager of Learning & Development, Liberty Bank (Left); **Susan Lewis**, Director at Balchem Corporation and COSC Foundation Board Member (Background).

Anthoinette Agyemang, a **Fall 2021 PiiT Scholarship Recipient**, attended the EAB and shared her appreciation, “this generosity has given me renewed hope that I will be able to continue my academic career with no financial issues. And now this scholarship will make my dream of getting a degree in Health Information Management, a reality and not just a dream. This scholarship will put me on track to graduate in the Spring of 2022 and enable me to provide a better future for my two children.”

Photo # 5 - Anthoinette Agyemang and **son Uzziah** (Center); **Gina Lippi** (employer), Complete Family Eye Care, (Right); **Timothy**, a guest (Left).

About Charter Oak and its Foundation

Founded in 1973, **Charter Oak State College** (www.CharterOak.edu) is Connecticut’s only public online college and is centrally located in New Britain. It is recognized as a military-friendly and transfer-friendly higher education institution that gives adults an affordable and convenient second chance to earn a degree. Offering associate and bachelor’s degrees in high-demand fields including Health Information Management, Nursing, Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Education and Business Administration. At the graduate level it

offers master's degrees in Health Informatics, Health Care Administration, and Organizational Effectiveness and Leadership. Charter Oak is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education and governed by Connecticut's Board of Regents for Higher Education.

The Charter Oak State College Foundation (www.CharterOak.edu/Foundation), established in 1977, is a non-profit tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization dedicated to supporting flexible and comprehensive degree completion opportunities for adults and technology innovations through the work of Charter Oak State College. The Foundation is a vehicle for accepting private gifts, donations, and bequests. Governed by an all-volunteer Board of Directors, the leadership provides direction for development activities and stewardship of the Foundation's assets. The Board is committed to assisting students meet their educational and career aspirations - *Creating Brighter Futures, One Degree at a Time*.

To learn more contact Carol Hall, Executive Director at chall@charteroak.edu, 860-515-3889.

EAB Event Photos:

#1 and 2 – Chief Stephen Clark, Newington Police Chief and Sergeant Henry Rodriguez



#3 - Svitlanna Czernee, Nadia Marynovych, Kristen Bodenstein, and Nicole Vezina from The Goddard School of Westport



#4 - Glenn Davis, COSC Foundation Treasurer and First Vice President, Community Development/CRA Officer at Liberty Bank); Dawn Ferry, VP, Manager of Learning & Development, Liberty Bank (Left); Susan Lewis, Director at Balchem Corporation and COSC Foundation Board Member (Background).



#5 - Anthoinette Agyemang, a Fall 2021 PiIT Scholarship Recipient and Gina Lippi (employer)



Other photos available on our Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/Charter-Oak-State-College-Foundation-110578583738401>

2020 Nominees | Golden Acorn Employer of the Year

- Russ Arnold, Public Works, Town of Farmington
- Sabrina Cameron, Adelbrook Behavioral and Development Services
- Brian Dahle, Senator, State of California
- Christiana Dennis-Fallah, Matulaitis Rehabilitation and Skilled Care
- Jessica Dory, LULAC Head Start, Inc.
- Holly Fitting, Care New England
- Carlos Franco, Naugatuck Valley Community College
- Maria Garza, East Coast Migrant Head Start Project
- Attorney Brooke Goff, Goff Law Group
- Pamela Hinton, Cheyenne's Early Learning Center
- Maureen Hogan, Charter Oak State College
- Nora McRoberts, Middlesex Health
- Donna Osuch, United Way of West Central Connecticut
- Jennifer Raines-Pusey, Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Hartford
- Stephanie Sanders, McCall Center for Behavioral Health
- Kara Smith, Bright and Early Learning Center
- Catherine Vanicky, Honey Bear Learning Center

2021 Nominees | Golden Acorn Employer of the Year

- Rodney Barco, Hartford Fire Department
- Rolanda Booker, Northend Elementary School
- Sara Castle, Imagine Nation
- Diane Clare-Kearney, Director of Equity and Adult Education, Manchester
- Stephen Clark, Chief of Police, Newington Police Department
- Maureen Croteau, University of Connecticut
- Svitlana Czernee, Nadia Marynovych, and Kristen Bodenstein, The Goddard School of Westport
- Adeli DeArce, LULAC Head Start Inc.
- Renee DeHart, Samford University, McWhorter School of Pharmacy
- Kevin Ferrarotti, EMS Hartford Hospital
- Maria Garza, East Coast Migrant Head Start Project
- Matthew Geary, Superintendent. Manchester Public Schools
- Anita Gennaro, Meriden Public Schools
- Jack Gilligan, Southfield Children Center
- Gail Haynes, Pension Real Estate Association (PREA)
- Linda Hickey, Population Health
- Regina Hurlburt, Housatonic Childcare Center
- David Jones, Goodwill of Western and Northern Connecticut
- Gina Lippi, Complete Family Eye Care
- Dennis Littky, College Unbound
- Young Liu, Wethersfield Family Dental, Dentist
- Lisa Matulewicz, Baby Bee's Play and Learn Center
- Diane Pappacoda, Community Dining Room
- Ann Parisi, Yale New Haven Health Bridgeport Hospital
- Cynthia Pirro, Easter Seals
- Eric Protulis, Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES)
- Marta Saklawska, Creative Starts
- Valerie Santos, Duncaster
- Rebeka Scalia, Charter Oak State College Foundation
- Jeffrey Segal, CIG Partners Wealth Management
- Kim Sherman, The Goddard School of Fairfield
- Dave Stuyanski, Frito Lay
- Ezra Taito, Frito Lay
- Michael Tweedie, MOSAIC LLC
- Danielle Wilcox, Hartford HealthCare Backus Hospital