



michigan high school athletic association

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Ganakas, VanKuiken To Receive Women In Sports Leadership Award

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Feb. 16 – Two Flint area athletic administrators – Gail Ganakas of Flint Community Schools, and Deb VanKuiken of Holly High School – have been named the recipients of the 2008-09 Women In Sports Leadership Award by the Representative Council of the Michigan High School Athletic Association.

Each year the Representative Council considers the achievements of women coaches, officials and athletic administrators affiliated with the MHSAA who show exemplary leadership capabilities and positive contributions to athletics. This is the first time since the award was initiated in 1990 that two individuals will be honored. The award will be presented to Ganakas at halftime of the Class C championship game in the MHSAA Girls Basketball Tournament at the Convocation Center in Ypsilanti on March 21; and VanKuiken will receive her award at the Michigan Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association Conference in Traverse City on March 22.

Ganakas is currently the Executive Director of Community Education and Recreation for Flint Community Schools, where she has served for 36 years. Coming on the athletic scene when schools were beginning to initiate athletic programs for girls, she was a teacher-coach at Holmes Junior High School before becoming principal at Whittier Middle School. In her current position, she has been instrumental in designing study table programs for high school and middle school student-athletes, an athletic handbook for the school district and athletic fundraising.

Also an athletic leader in the community, Ganakas has served as the only female to chair the local CANUSA Games which involve over 15,000 participants annually in 20 sports from Flint and Hamilton, Ontario. She has also served as a board member locally for Big Brothers-Big Sisters, the Welch Foundation; and nationally for the alumni association at Michigan State University, from which she received her bachelor's degree in 1971 and her master's degree in 1975. She earned her doctoral degree in education from Western Michigan University in 1982. She is a 1967 graduate of East Lansing High School.

"Flint has long been regarded for its school sports programs, and Gail Ganakas has been a tireless proponent of preparing young women in particular for the most important game of all – the game of life – through athletics," said John E. "Jack" Roberts, Executive Director of the MHSAA. "Her strong work ethic, respect for others and a desire to give back to the community make her a worthy recipient of this award."

VanKuiken coached and taught at Bridgeport High School for 12 years before moving to Holly in 1996 to become the school's assistant principal and athletic director. Since 2002, she has been a full time athletic administrator. A 1979 graduate of Lansing Sexton High School where she competed in softball, tennis and volleyball; VanKuiken played field hockey at Central Michigan University and earned her bachelor's degree in 1984. She received her master's degree from Educational Administration from CMU in 1994.

As athletic director at Holly, she has enhanced the school's athletic handbook for coaches and student-athletes, expanded the Broncho Hall of Fame, and served as an MHSAA committee member and tournament host on multiple occasions. She has also made significant contributions as a presenter at Women In Sports Leadership Conferences conducted by the MHSAA. VanKuiken has also held leadership roles within the Tri Valley Conference and the Michigan Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association; having served during the 2007-08 school year at the MIAAA's president, and is in the middle of a five-year term on its Board of Directors.

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“Deb VanKuiken’s work touches many people in so many ways,” Roberts said. “From promoting good sporting behavior at her school and league, to encouraging our female athletes, to helping set the tone for educational athletics statewide, her leadership skills and vision have put her at the forefront. We’re pleased to honor her with the Women In Sports Leadership Award.”

The honoring of Ganakas and VanKuiken brings to 21 the number of Women In Sports Leadership Award recipients. Past recipients are:

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| 1990 – Carol Seavoy, L’Anse | 2000 – Pat Richardson, Grass Lake |
| 1991 – Diane Laffey, Harper Woods | 2001 – Suzanne Martin, East Lansing |
| 1992 – Patricia Ashby, Scotts | 2002 – Susan Barthold, Kentwood |
| 1993 – Jo Lake, Grosse Pointe | 2003 – Nancy Clark, Flint |
| 1994 – Brenda Gatlin, Detroit | 2004 – Kathy Vrugink Westdorp, Grand Rapids |
| 1995 – Jane Bennett, Ann Arbor | 2005 – Barbara Redding, Capac |
| 1996 – Cheryl Amos-Helmicki, Huntington Woods | 2006 – Melanie Miller, Lansing |
| 1997 – Delores L. Elswick, Detroit | 2007 – Jan Sander, Warren Woods |
| 1998 – Karen S. Leinaar, Delton | 2008 – Jane Bos, Grand Rapids |
| 1999 – Kathy McGee, Flint | |

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 1,600 public and private senior high schools and junior high/middle schools which exists to develop common rules for athletic eligibility and competition. No government funds or tax dollars support the MHSAA, which was the first such association nationally to not accept membership dues or tournament entry fees from schools. Member schools which enforce these rules are permitted to participate in MHSAA tournaments, which attract approximately 1.6 million spectators each year.

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