

Alachua County Public Schools food service director named 'Trayblazer' in national recognition program

It's her photo on the Wheaties box, but Alachua County Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) director Maria Eunice says her recent national recognition is a tribute to her entire department.

Eunice has been named a 'Trayblazer' by General Mills, the U.S.-based company that produces thousands of food products, including the cereal brand Wheaties in its iconic box. The company is currently recognizing school nutrition staff across the nation "who have gone above and beyond to ensure kids are fed in their communities" during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Besides being one of four Trayblazers featured on the company's website, Eunice has received a commemorative Wheaties box replica featuring her name and photo.

"I'm honored to be recognized, but I have to give credit to our amazing team," said Eunice. "They are committed serving students every day, despite all the challenges of the pandemic."

Eunice, who has led the FNS Department for 16 years, says that team has made it possible for the district to take advantage of every meal program offered to schools by the federal government. There's a significant amount of additional paperwork, planning and monitoring required for each program, besides all the work required to actually implement them. But Eunice and her staff have made it happen.

Currently the district provides breakfasts, lunches, snacks and suppers in both brick-and-mortar settings and curbside. Since the beginning of the pandemic, FNS has provided more than 6 million free meals to children ages 0 to 18 throughout Alachua County, and those meals will continue through the end of July.

This is not the first national recognition for Eunice recently. Just a few months ago, she was named winner of the prestigious Golden School Foodservice Director of the Year Award, the highest honor awarded by the School Nutrition Association.

Since that award was announced, Eunice has received many calls from colleagues throughout the nation.

"We've had a lot of people wanting to know how it is we have been so successful during the pandemic, and how we've been able to serve so many children and keep our program thriving," she said.

During the pandemic, the department has used many innovative strategies to support children, including the delivery of meals by school bus during the shutdown period and the use of QR codes on food bags to provide families with recipes and other important information.

More information about Eunice and the Trayblazer recognition program is available at: <https://bit.ly/3dvQ1zn>. More information about the district's meal programs is available at www.yourchoicefresh.com.

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