

# Human Resource Services

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## Gallery of Winners

### Ananda La Vita

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Each year, the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) is required by federal law to produce the Annual Security and Fire Safety Report, aka Clery Report, which includes on-campus crime, arrest, and fire safety statistics for the previous three years and features University policies and practices intended to promote safety and security.

The UMB Police Department (UMBPD), Office of Accountability and Compliance (OAC), and Office of Communications and Public Affairs (OCPA) contribute to producing the Clery Report, which involves numerous updates and edits and spans 180 pages, making for a laborious process. For one UMB employee integral to the Clery Report's production, however, it's a labor of love.

"I enjoy having a big project to get into the zone with," said Ananda La Vita, graphic designer, OCPA, who has designed the

Clery Report booklet/PDF since 2019. "It's oddly enjoyable to organize a mass of material into a coherent structure."

La Vita's work on the Clery Report and other projects was highlighted Jan. 13 in a videoconference where she was surprised with news that she had been named UMB's Employee of the Month for January. President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, and staff members from UMBPD, OAC, and OCPA were on hand to celebrate La Vita, who thought she was attending a meeting to discuss producing the 2023 Clery Report and was stunned at the announcement of her award.

"Ananda, you have a look of amazement on your face," Jarrell said with a smile. "But we really are here today to celebrate you. You are the first Employee of the Month of 2023, so congratulations on this great accomplishment. Your colleagues wrote a glowing report about all of your hard work, particularly on the Clery Report, so I know this is a well-deserved recognition."

Dana Rampolla, director of integrated marketing, who manages the Clery project for OCPA, nominated La Vita for the award, noting her organizational skills in gathering updates from the offices involved in producing the report, which was revamped and redesigned in 2019 to make it easier to read and more aesthetically appealing.

“Ananda has worked tirelessly on the Clery Report the past few years and navigated a lot of changes and requests — many times last-minute requests — for this very long, deadline-driven project,” Rampolla said. “The report has evolved tremendously over the last two years especially, and it has become better aligned with the Clery committee’s goal of generating a solid marketing piece while meeting the Oct. 1 deadline each year.

“Ananda shows great attention to detail, patience for those around her and their varying communication styles, and an ability to meet the deadline with changing and challenging obstacles. I value her involvement when working on a project together because, with these traits, she truly demonstrates what being a team player means.”

Julie Bower, who is assistant director of design services for OCPA and La Vita’s supervisor, agreed.

“Everyone recognizes the improvement in the Clery Report since Ananda has taken it on from a design standpoint and just how organized she’s been in producing it,” Bower said. “I’ve worked on the Clery Report in the past, and it’s a very big project. Ananda has definitely taken a leadership role on this project that is much appreciated.”

Laura Kozak, MA, senior associate vice president, OCPA, said, “The Clery Report is an important project because it helps UMB promote a safe and secure campus for our students, faculty, staff, and visitors. I appreciate Ananda’s hard work and dedication to this report and all of her projects.”

Vanessa Harrington, director of security and compliance, UMBPD, added to the praise.

“I joined in the middle of the Clery Report process last year, and I had 8 million questions and 8 million ideas,” Harrington said. “Every time I wanted to thank someone for their efforts, they kept saying, ‘Thank Ananda.’ So I appreciate Ananda’s patience with the process, and I appreciate that she made everything look good.”

La Vita says her efforts on the Clery Report are motivated in part by her appreciation for Title IX, the federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs and activities. The law overlaps with the Clery Report in relation to institutional response to incidents of dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

“I care about Title IX,” said La Vita, who joined UMB in 2017. “I think it’s an important law, and Clery is an important report. I value the transparency that this report offers to UMB students and employees around crime and how to avoid potential crime.”

In addition to the Clery Report, La Vita designs the UMB President’s Message newsletter each month as well as flyers, digital displays, brochures, and other marketing material for UMB schools, offices, and initiatives such as Launch Your Life, the UMBrella Group, and the Donaldson Brown Riverfront Event Center. She also is OCPA’s go-to person for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Section 508 compliance on such materials.

Rampolla also praised La Vita’s commitment to accessibility.

“Ananda wears many hats on the OCPA design team, and she is responsible for ensuring the ADA compliance of a large number of digital documents produced by our office,” Rampolla said. “This is a detail-oriented task, and she continuously looks for ways to improve her knowledge and skills in this area to generate top-notch products.”

La Vita, who will receive a plaque, letter of commendation, and a \$250 bonus as Employee of the Month rewards, said, “I appreciate the freedom I have to take initiative around accessibility, specifically making PDFs accessible, and to learn more about it.

“I support the concept of universal design — making graphically designed items as easy and understandable to use as possible for everyone,” added La Vita, who said the surprise of winning the award left her at a loss for words during the teleconference.

“I was expecting to be in the background of that meeting, taking notes, and all of a sudden President Jarrell shows up on the screen and he’s addressing me directly, so I was a little shocked by that,” she said. “I’m still a little shocked five days later. But it’s so gratifying to be recognized like that, and I really appreciate Dana, Julie, and all of my colleagues for their support.”

— Lou Cortina

# Human Resource Services

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## Gallery of Winners

### Shawnta Privette

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When the University of Maryland, Baltimore Police Department (UMBPD) needs help, Shawnta Privette, MSL, is there to answer the call.

Over the past year, the police communications supervisor has worked to address the need to hire more dispatchers, overseen the transition to handling dispatch calls for both UMB and the University of Baltimore (UBalt), conducted training for UMB and other campuses in the region, and even found erroneous invoices submitted to UMBPD that would have cost the department \$60,000. She has done this all while supervising nine police communication operators (PCOs), several of whom praise her as the best supervisor they've had.

Privette was surprised during a videoconference Feb. 23 by UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, with the news that she has been named UMB's February Employee of the Month. Jarrell was joined by Dawn M. Rhodes, DBA, senior vice president and chief business and finance officer; Thomas Leone, MSL, assistant vice president for public safety and chief of police, as well as numerous UMBPD colleagues.

"Ms. Privette is a blessing. She has taken our communications center to a place that it's never been before, and it's all of her hard work and dedication," Leone said. "We see her at work eight or 10 or 12 hours a day, but after that, she's still working on mastering her craft and her trade. She's visited communication centers all around the region to make ours shine."

Privette was instrumental in addressing a staffing shortage of PCOs, according to her supervisor, Lt. Matthew Johnson, who nominated her for the award.

"Ms. Privette has coordinated with police command staff and HR to successfully fill all PCO vacancies. She was pivotal in creating the appropriate interview questions, giving input throughout the selection process, training all new hires, and ensuring their success once assigned to a shift," he said. "The number of available dispatchers has tripled since December 2021 and there has been zero turnover. That retention of our staff is a direct reflection of the work environment that Ms. Privette has created in the communications center. She has developed a culture of respect, compassion, and sustainability while ensuring there is a good work-life balance for her staff."

Her colleagues said Privette sets the example.

“She is a great person, not just professionally but also personally,” said PCO Cornelius Campbell. “She just cares, and she works so hard.”

PCO Ashley Combs agreed, saying, “Her dedication and leadership is amazing.”

Privette said one of her favorite things about UMB is the ability to grow, which is evident in her support of her employees.

“A lot of times people equate your success with your title,” she said. “My success is when someone I’ve supervised is able to leave here and be better somewhere else because of what I’ve given them here. They can move in their career path with assurance and confidence that they have enough.”

Johnson said she makes sure her employees have work-life balance. “She treats her employees with so much love and respect that goes above and beyond with them outside of what the job requires,” he said.

In addition to supervising and training PCOs, Privette is responsible for maintaining UMB’s security infrastructure, such as the alarm, camera, and One Card building access systems. Her administrative duties include reviewing invoices, and she discovered UMBPD was being double billed \$60,000 for work that was included in a contract.

“Ms. Privette is one of the first lines of defense in being a responsible steward of UMB funds. Her attention to detail prevented the waste of funds and initiated an additional review and audit of invoices submitted to the communications center for service,” Johnson said.

In 2022, Privette’s and the communications center’s monitoring responsibilities grew when UMBPD took over management of the policing on UBalt’s campus. Johnson praised her work managing both campuses.

“The implementation of that growth was seamless, thanks to Ms. Privette,” he said. “There were no major issues in expanding the footprint that the communications center was responsible for, as the UMB communications center became the only collegiate police communications center in Baltimore City — and likely the state — responsible for two different university campuses.”

Rhodes also praised Privette’s work with the transition.

“You are setting the excellence for doing that type of work within higher ed,” Rhodes said. “You are so dedicated and care so much. You can see that day in and day out the way you operate with people.”

Privette said the challenge with the transition was making sure training went smoothly.

“We needed to train the PCOs to be able to monitor both campuses confidently as if they were monitoring only one,” she said.

In addition to her police work, Privette has served on the UMB Staff Senate for nearly three years, recently working on the elections committee. Most of the executive committee attended the surprise announcement of the award and praised her dedication.

“She has stepped up for every kind of occasion, every kind of opportunity. It’s not only that she’s the first to put up her hand, but that she will put up her hand and you know that she’s going to do it better than anybody else could,” said Staff Senate president Gregory Brightbill, MBA, MEd. “I am just so blessed to not only have her as a colleague and a friend, but to also serve alongside her as a leader, for she is leading so much and having such a huge impact.”

Privette, who has worked for UMBPD since 2016, said she was “beyond words” at winning the award.

“The late nights, the tears, the frustration, the joy, the smiles, it’s in that moment that you realize it is not in vain, that it’s more than just about you,” she said. “It’s about those you impact and what you do.”

Privette, who will receive a plaque, a letter of commendation, and an extra \$250 in her next paycheck for the award, thanked Jarrell, Rhodes, Leone, Johnson, and Assistant Chief Tonya Bell, MS, as well as her colleagues in the communications center.

“AC Bell always encourages me to be my very best, and Lieutenant Johnson saw the very best in me,” she said. “And my staff walks with me in the vision that we have. If it was not for their support, this journey would be a lonely walk.”

She added that the Employee of the Month award has personal meaning. “The legacy that I leave for my children, my grandchildren, and maybe one day my great-grandchildren will speak volumes of persevering no matter what is at stake,” Privette said. “Persevering in spite of economic hardships and persevering in spite of your age. Persevering because you have a passion. It is in the perseverance that you can produce your greatest moments in life.”

— Jen Badie

# Human Resource Services

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## Gallery of Winners

### Mio Kamijo

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Tears of joy flowed March 17 when Mio Kamijo, MA, was surprised with news that she had been selected as the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) Employee of the Month for March. And the tears weren't just from the award recipient.

Several of Kamijo's colleagues from the Office of International Services (OIS) and the Center for Global Engagement (CGE) were on the videoconference — and they got emotional, too, when discussing their admiration and respect for Kamijo, who is an international student advisor for OIS, which works closely with CGE on its programming.

In fact, joy was a theme in her co-workers' remarks.

"Mio is maybe the most organized, on-top-of-everything person I've ever worked with," said Michelle Sullivan, global program specialist. "When I walk in the office and see that her door is open and her lights are on, I get so happy and excited. She is just a joy to work with."

Virginia Rowthorn, JD, LL.M., assistant vice president for global engagement and executive director of CGE, said of Kamijo: "Her knowledge on all sides of international education has been such a gift to me and to everyone here. The knowledge from her experiences in Japan, Finland, and all over the world supports everything we do. It's such a joy to come in and see Mio in the office."

Gina Dreyer, MA, associate director of international services, said, "It's a joy to be Mio's supervisor. We've worked closely together for over four years, and I appreciate how detailed-oriented and talented she is. I appreciate everything she does and the way she works with our international students. I'm really happy that she is being recognized by UMB."

Kamijo thought she was having a one-on-one Webex meeting with Amy Ramirez, MA, executive director of global learning and international services, and was surprised to see more than 10 people on the screen. UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, was on the videoconference, and he gave her the good news.

"I have heard a bunch of wonderful things about you and the special impact you are having with our international students and in the Center for Global Engagement," Jarrell said. "You are a special person, and I appreciate all of your great efforts."

Kamijo's work in helping to organize a new course at the University of Maryland Graduate School, Global Health Aging — Gerontology in Japan, was cited in the award nomination, which was submitted by Dreyer, Ramirez, and Flavius Lilly, PhD, MA, MPH, vice dean, Graduate School, and vice provost, academic and student affairs, UMB. The course begins in April and includes in-person classes and a two-week trip to Japan in June.

"Mio has made possible a study abroad experience for a group of students in nursing, social work, medicine, pharmacy, and biomedical research," Lilly said in the nomination. "She has taken the lead in coordinating all of the logistics for the experience, including working with over a dozen partner organizations in Japan.

"Throughout the planning process, Mio has always represented the University with the utmost professionalism," Lilly added. "She has been a true ambassador for our institution. Without Mio's hard work and dedication, the study abroad experience would not be possible. She has brought to life an important component of the University's strategic plan to offer global experiences to our students."

Dreyer and Ramirez noted in the nomination that in just over four years at UMB, "Mio has grown so much and has truly owned her work engaging with the international student community on our campus. International students regularly compliment Mio for her responsiveness and empathetic approach to advising. Everything Mio touches is done in a professional, timely, and thorough manner."

They also praised Kamijo's efforts to foster an inclusive atmosphere for international students at UMB. For instance, Kamijo partnered with the Division of Student Affairs to create the Global Perspectives Conversation Program, where international students and postdoctoral fellows can explore common interests, discuss concerns about U.S. academic and social life, and deliberate on matters of cultural, social, and political importance.

"This program has helped international students and scholars build community on the UMB campus, which was especially important when interpersonal connection was so difficult to find during the COVID-19 pandemic," they wrote in the nomination, also noting that Kamijo created another program, Senior Student Talk, which connects current international students with incoming students to help prepare them for U.S. academic culture and life in Baltimore.

"Mio has helped UMB make progress toward becoming an inclusive campus where international students feel they belong," they wrote.

Kamijo, who was born and raised in Japan, has great interest in languages and international education. She studied in Hong Kong, England, and Finland before coming to the United States in 2016 and completing a graduate certificate in program evaluation from Florida State University. Previously in Japan, she worked to help high school students learn English and be placed in study abroad programs.

"I've always been passionate about the field of international education and really happy to assist with international students," Kamijo said. "Having been an international student myself, I can relate to them."

Ramirez said international students go out of their way to praise Kamijo, who supports them in dealing with federal immigration regulations as well as academic and cultural issues.

"I hear this routinely — the students tell me how wonderful Mio is in the way she cares about them and follows through with dedication," Ramirez said. "Mio has so many wonderful skills and is a huge asset to the institution in the way she brings together competence and caring. That's why we love Mio."

Kamijo returned the love, thanking her colleagues for their support and kind comments. She said being recognized by UMB was a humbling experience.

"This award was a big surprise — I didn't expect this," said Kamijo, who will receive a plaque, letter of commendation, and \$250 in her next paycheck as Employee of the Month rewards. "I appreciate all of my co-workers, and I truly enjoy the work I do. I'm really happy and honored to work at UMB and receive this recognition."

— Lou Cortina

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### Jen Canapp

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To many of the University of Maryland School of Social Work (UMSSW) PhD students, Jen Canapp is the “PhD mom.”

The academic services specialist for the PhD program has picked up international students at Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport. She’s helped them navigate the Social Security Administration office. And she’s made sure they’re taken care of when they’ve had to quarantine after a flight because of the COVID-19 pandemic, giving them sweets and goodies.

She said she makes these extra efforts because she’d want someone to look out for her child if the situation was reversed.

“If it was my child going to a new country for the first time, I would want them to have someone there who would at least guide them through the first steps of being in a new country,” Canapp said. “Being a foreign student, it’s hard to navigate. I want to provide that level of support. I would not want them to go through that without someone there to have their back.”

Canapp, who has been called the glue and the mainstay of the UMSSW PhD program, was honored for her efforts to support students and faculty members on April 18 when she was surprised by University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, on a videoconference with the news that she is the University’s April Employee of the Month.

“It’s people like you who make this institution great,” Jarrell said as more than two dozen of Canapp’s colleagues, many of whom had contributed to her nomination, as well as students celebrated her achievement.

UMSSW Dean Judy L. Postmus, PhD, ACSW, said Canapp is the backbone of the program.

“I am so proud of you getting this award. It is so well deserved and so long deserved,” Postmus said. “All the students need to do is come to you when they have problems, and you are always there for them. I’m so happy that I get a chance to work with such an awesome staff member.”

Canapp, who supports about 40 PhD students, helps them from the time they apply to the program to the time they graduate.



“It’s one of the best parts of the job, and it’s also one of the hardest to be with them for such a long time and then to let them go. But it’s exciting to see them on the next part of their journey,” said Canapp, adding that many of the graduates stay in touch, sending her photos of their children and Christmas cards.

Canapp’s supervisor, Bethany Lee, PhD, director of the PhD and postdoctoral programs, praised her support of students and faculty.

“Her greatest strength is arguably her compassionate approach to every interaction with faculty, colleagues, and students. She always leads with kindness,” Lee said. “Given Jen’s role, she is often the first UMB employee that our PhD students meet and one of their most important resources in the program. Every student feels like she is in their corner, and they regularly let me know how essential her support has been to their success.”

Allison Deitz, MSW ’18, MSc, LCSW-C, a part-time PhD student, said Canapp made a deep impression on her.

“From the very beginning, even students who are just thinking about applying, you make them feel seen and known and that they matter,” she told Canapp during the videoconference. “And to have that just unconditionally from the beginning was one of the ways that I knew that this program was ‘it’ for me and that this was going to be my home for the next five years or so.”

In addition to supporting students, which can involve helping applicants with their documentation and assisting with travel reimbursement, Canapp serves on the PhD program committee, whose role is to evaluate the program, including how it supports students.

Professor Lisa Berlin, PhD, was one of a dozen colleagues who nominated Canapp for the award.

“Jen is the unofficial ‘mom’ of the School of Social Work PhD program. She not only keeps all of the program administration details in tip-top order but also does so with authentic commitment, a ready ear, and a genuine smile — every time,” Berlin said. “She is a creative problem-solver, an extremely efficient communicator, and an exceedingly kind presence, especially toward students who experience stress or challenges. Jen is the kind of person who brings out the best in everyone around her, and that is just one of the many ways in which she benefits our campus community as a whole.”

Canapp said her favorite part of her job is being able to help people. This was on display during the pandemic, when she set up drop-in Zoom sessions so she could meet with students who needed help.

“That worked out well, but it’s so good to be back and to be able to see them and check in with them daily,” said Canapp, who sits in the reception area and greets students on their way to class. “I can gauge whether they’re doing OK or not, and they come to me when they need something.”

She said she also enjoys working with the program’s faculty members.

“The people in the School of Social Work are very kind, and they’re very supportive,” she said.

Canapp, who will receive a plaque, a letter of commendation, and an extra \$250 in her next paycheck, said she felt humbled and grateful to win the award. She expressed appreciation for the three directors, including Lee, whom she has worked with over the past 11 years.

“The directors have really considered me a part of their team, not just a staff member,” she said.

— Jen Badie

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### Darcel Douthitt

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Darcel Douthitt, a human resources generalist at the University of Maryland Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center (UMGCCC), is credited with saving lives.

Douthitt oversees payroll, general HR issues, postdoctoral appointments, faculty and academic affairs-related support, and, perhaps most importantly, new hires and appointments for over 200 University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) employees at UMGCCC.

Over 16 years in the role, her duties were never more important than during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the UMGCCC Clinical Research Management Office (CRMO) lost 40 percent of its staff to the pharmacy industry, affecting the CRMO's ability to conduct clinical trials for cancer patients.

"At one point, the CRMO was so short of staff that new clinical trials in our solid tumor [such as breast, lung, prostate, and GI] cancer research program were called to a halt over safety concerns due to the lack of qualified staff. We were placed in the position of not being able to offer new therapies to cancer

patients," said Robert Mitchell, associate director for administration at UMGCCC and Douthitt's supervisor. "Can you imagine being a cancer patient, looking forward to joining a trial, and not being able to?"

Douthitt supported the logistics of placing ads in various forums and prescreening candidates and provided the support necessary to hire essential full-time employees in a rapid, ongoing fashion while continuing to perform her regular duties.

"We were able to get that back up and running because of what she did," Mitchell said.

For these efforts, Douthitt was named the UMB Employee of the Month for May. She was surprised with the news on a videoconference May 17 with UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, who called her work "spectacular."

"This is why we exist. This is one of the reasons for this university. And it's so easy to forget that that's part of our mission. And you are an exemplary example of that, and we would all hope that we would have the same kind of person standing behind us when we need help," Jarrell said.

Kevin J. Cullen, MD, UGCCC director and the Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Distinguished Professor of Oncology, University of Maryland School of Medicine, said Douthitt is responsible for the most important component of the cancer center.

“Her diligence, professionalism, judgment, and good humor serve all of us and facilitate all that we do,” he said. “She is a most valued colleague and very deserving of this award.”

Douthitt said she was shocked to receive the award.

“I love my job. I love what I do. I love the people that I serve,” she said. “I’ve had two family members being treated and died at the cancer center as well. It feels good to know that you’re behind the scenes, working for a greater cause. We have a great team here in the cancer center, and I’m just honored.”

Robert Villanueva, MPA, director of the CRMO, called Douthitt a superhero and one of the most valuable resources at the cancer center.

“Absolutely every single ounce of credit to the CRMO surviving and now thriving goes to Darcel,” he said. “Darcel was able to cajole people, and her doing that saved lives. I can’t think of any higher calling. Some of these actions demonstrably saved lives or gave people hope.”

The CRMO consists of 70 staff members who oversee 500 clinical trials that enroll nearly 1,500 patients a year.

“Oncology patients are the most fragile and clinically complex in all of medicine,” Villanueva said. “To enroll in a clinical trial means a patient has failed other lines of therapy so they are truly looking for miracles.”

Villanueva said Douthitt’s commitment to the mission of the cancer center and her dedication to people and patients make her stand out.

“She showed her extraordinary skill navigating the most complicated personnel landscape anyone has ever seen,” he said.

“Passivity was not an option, and over the course of several months she doubled down in every imaginable way to help find and onboard staff so that our patients could receive the care they desperately needed.

“We were truly a cancer center in crisis, and through it all, Darcel helped us keep our heads above water, kept us engaged, and provided the most up-to-date guidance from HR.”

Mitchell said Douthitt went above and beyond to respond to emails late in the evening or early in the morning to help with the restaffing of study nurses and coordinators, regulatory professionals, data managers, and clinical lab staff.

“Her flexibility, responsiveness, and innovative problem-solving skills benefited both the cancer center as a whole and our patients in particular,” he said.

Douthitt said she used different recruitment strategies during the hiring process. She also persuaded UMB’s HR to focus on retaining staff and was able to achieve equity increases and promotions so the center could retain the team members who stayed.

The center has been able to fill its staffing needs over the last 18 months.

Douthitt, who thanked her co-workers at the cancer center for their support, will receive a plaque, a letter of commendation, and an extra \$250 in her next paycheck for the Employee of the Month award.

She said one of her favorite parts of the job is “feeling like you’re part of something bigger: saving lives. That’s the end goal here.”

—Jen Badie

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### Angela Ober

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Angela Ober, senior sustainability specialist in the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) Office of Sustainability, made a lasting impact on children in the UMB Police Athletic/Activities League (PAL) program during Earth Month when she taught them about the importance of trees.

She created an educational workshop on how trees combat urban heat island effect, encouraging the children to become "Tree PALS" to protect trees in the city and helping them decorate ornaments made of pine cones during an event at the University's Community Engagement Center (CEC). Then she accompanied the children to a site on campus where UMB had planted trees to discuss the importance of native trees to Baltimore's local ecology, demonstrating urban heat island effect with an experiment in which the children touched the grass and the sidewalk. The children also decorated the trees.

"You got a group of preteens in our PAL program so excited about trees that when we went on a field trip recently, they made me go to a nature center and rent them magnifying

glasses so that we could run out and look at trees for three hours," Liv Alanis Myers, CEC program coordinator, told Ober. "And I fully credit that to you because you got them excited about it just by being there with your enthusiasm."

The program was just one example of the impact that Ober has had on UMB and its community in her two years at the University. Ober's work was celebrated June 21 during a videoconference with UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, who surprised her with the news that she was University's June Employee of the Month. He was joined by Ober's colleagues in the Office of Sustainability, which is part of UMB's Office of Administration and Finance, as well as representatives from departments across campus. They all praised her collaboration, partnership, positive attitude, and joyfulness.

"Angela's short time at UMB has already been so beneficial to the campus community. We often talk about the silos that exist at our institution, and Angela has been instrumental in helping to deconstruct those silos and reach across the aisle to offer help," said Elizabeth Main, MPA, associate director for sustainability and Ober's supervisor. "She has made it a point to look outside of her own

division and offer assistance with efforts across the campus aimed at making processes more efficient. She doesn't do any of it for glory or recognition — she does it because it's the right thing to do and she wants to make a positive impact in support of the collective good."

Ober has produced a wide variety of work, including program proposals, interactive maps, reports, articles in *The Elm*, web content, event flyers, and social media graphics to get the message out about sustainability — part of UMB's core values. She spearheads several initiatives, including greenhouse gas reporting for the University, annual sustainability progress reporting, and a Resiliency Working Group. And she has developed relationships across UMB's seven schools and central administration, as well as partnerships with the University of Maryland Medical Center's sustainability staff, Baltimore City's Office of Sustainability, and sustainability staff at other area universities.

Ober said that because university sustainability offices are usually small — UMB's currently consists of Ober, Main, and two fellows — collaborating with colleagues and students is important.

"We rely on the help of a lot of others who are also passionate about sustainability in their own departments or offices to help us get work done across campus," she said. "We have a joke in our office that we infiltrate different areas and try and meet as many people as possible so we can grow that network and that support."

She said this teamwork is her favorite part of the job.

"We do a good job here talking about what UMB is doing to foster change to support the campus, the community, and the planet and reduce our impact on the planet," she said. "And what really makes that an interesting part of the job is it's not just coming from our office, it's something that UMB collectively is doing to make that work happen."

One of Ober's most high-profile projects has been the self-service waste initiative, which has been rolled out in 19 buildings so far this year. Individual desk-side trash cans are removed, and students, faculty, and staff are responsible for bringing their waste to centrally located waste stations. Custodial technicians collect trash and recycling from the common receptacles.

"It's definitely been a conversation piece," Ober said. "It's more than just increasing our recycling rate. It's also about preventing things from getting incinerated like the liners in the individual bins."

The initiative was highlighted in the office's nomination for the Maryland Green Registry Sustainability Leadership Awards, which are given to member organizations that show a strong commitment to sustainable practices, measurable results, and continual improvement. [UMB received this award in June 2023](#) and also was honored for its sustainability efforts in 2022 with a [Green Level People Loving and Nurturing Trees Award](#), which recognizes community efforts to care for trees, and a Tree Campus Higher Education designation by the Arbor Day Foundation.

"Her efforts are greatly felt across campus, although many people may not know that, and I'm appreciative of everything that she does," said Anna Borgerding, PMP, assistant vice president, Facilities and Operations, and former director of sustainability. "She does it in such a manner that is inclusive, provides feedback, and gives us better solutions than the ones we think of in the beginning."

With the help of UMB's design and construction project managers, Ober recently put together a comprehensive map and dashboard to show campus construction projects that may affect pedestrian, cycling, or vehicle traffic. This work used her geographic information systems (GIS) skills; she is working toward her Master of Professional Studies in GIS at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Ober also serves on Baltimore City's Climate Action Plan Technical Advisory Group as the UMB representative. Members will meet four times and discuss strategies the city needs to put into place to reduce waste from businesses and residential areas.

"It blew me away to know that a small shop of two or three people was able to get so much done, and you are such a critical part of that," Dawn M. Rhodes, DBA, senior vice president and chief business and finance officer, told Ober during the videoconference.

Anthony Consoli, MArch, University architect and an advocate for sustainability, said, "It means so much when so much of our mission as a university is related to health care, and sustainability at its core is about health. Thank you, Angela, for all you've done."

As Employee of the Month, Ober will receive a plaque, a letter of commendation, and an extra \$250 in her next paycheck. She said she was humbled and grateful to receive the award and thanked Main and other colleagues from around UMB for their support.

“Elizabeth is a great supervisor,” Ober said. “Between the two of us, and when Anna was part of our team, I was surprised how fast we could get things done in terms of sustainability initiatives.”

— Jen Badie

# Human Resource Services

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## Gallery of Winners

### Enjoli Sonnier

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You want to work with Enjoli Sonnier? Get in line.

The associate director of events at the University of Maryland School of Nursing (UMSON), Sonnier, MBA, MS, is extremely popular among her co-workers in the Office of Communications and beyond. According to her supervisor, Giordana Segneri, MA, “Everyone wants Enjoli on their team.”

“That’s what I hear from everyone, all the time, about the respect she has garnered and the exceptional customer service she provides to constituents both inside the School of Nursing and external to it,” said Segneri, associate dean for marketing and communications. “She truly embodies the UMB core values of respect and integrity. Her No. 1 priority is ensuring that the school is well-represented and that our primary constituents, our students, are well-served.”

Segneri heaped more praise upon her colleague during a videoconference July 10, when Sonnier was named the University of Maryland, Baltimore’s (UMB) Employee of the Month for July. UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, kicked off the meeting by surprising Sonnier with the news, saying, “The award nomination was a glowing evaluation of your

performance, and it’s just exceptional, so congratulations and thank you,” before handing things off to Segneri.

“We’re the lucky ones to have Enjoli on our team in the Office of Communications because she is an exceptional team player,” Segneri said. “She always has the best interests of the school at heart, and she pushes us to think about that all the time. She’s always considering our key constituents, especially our students, faculty, and staff, and she is the tide that lifts all boats.”

Jane M. Kirschling, PhD, RN, FAAN, the outgoing Bill and Joanne Conway Dean of the School of Nursing, was on the videoconference and praised Sonnier, too, noting that they had worked together during her entire 10½-year tenure as dean, which would be ending the following week.

“Enjoli has been here on the whole journey with me, keeping me on track, organizing amazing events, and making people feel welcome,” said Kirschling, who will be moving to Colorado in retirement and was celebrated with a Western-themed sendoff at the school in late June. “I will always hold in my memory the time when she put on her sheriff’s outfit and came as a cowgirl to my

sendoff. She didn't dance on the stairs with me, but I'll forgive her because she knows she is the sheriff of the School of Nursing. Enjoli, you are so special, and I thank you."

Sonnier has worked at UMSON since 2001, starting as a secretary, moving to a support role in information technology, joining the Office of Communications in 2007, and taking over as events coordinator two years later. She helps organize National Nurses Week events; the Maryland Action Coalition's annual conference; retirement farewells; dean's events such as Seeds of Change, which honored two trailblazing UMSON alumna this year; and events held at UMSON by outside constituents.

"I'd say Nurses Week is probably one of my favorite times of year," Sonnier said. "It's a hectic time of year, but it allows student involvement and it's great to see the smile on students' faces when they attend. And it says that we thank them for actually being our customers, essentially, and it's a joy to see students graduate and know that they are alumni of a prestigious school.

"I wear many hats, but the main hat I wear is helping people to create events from their content and concepts," she added. "I also love to develop relationships and connect with people who aren't necessarily in my industry. It's good to connect and understand the different aspects of events that are held within your organization."

Sonnier also helps out at graduation time by designing event programs, manages digital displays throughout the UMSON building, and has become adept at using vFairs, a virtual conferencing platform that incorporates visuals and multimedia content. During the COVID-19 pandemic when UMSON was teleworking and conducting classes online, Sonnier took the lead on determining how the school's events could continue virtually and co-chaired a Universitywide committee involved in determining an appropriate platform.

"Since our return to in-person working and learning, she has continued to enhance and perfect these events, capitalizing on the benefits of continuing to offer them fully virtually or, in some cases, offering them in a hybrid environment, often doubling the work involved," Segneri said. "She is always willing to roll up her sleeves to get the work done, and she is always willing to lend a hand, even when the task isn't necessarily part of her job responsibilities."

Sonnier will receive a plaque, letter of commendation from Jarrell, and \$250 in her next paycheck as rewards for the UMB honor. Being honored was "definitely surprising," she said, because she thought the videoconference was to discuss welcoming UMSON's new dean.

"Winning an award like this was something that I never thought about because I'm just so involved in doing the job every day," Sonnier said. "But I do think it's important to know that someone really supports what you're doing and can take that moment to say thank you, to congratulate you, and recognize you for just the smallest of efforts."

Two of the people on the videoconference, both representing the Staff Senate, could relate to Sonnier's recognition, as they are past Employees of the Month — Shawnta Privette, MSL, of UMB Police and Public Safety, and Taylor DeBoer, MA, of the University of Maryland Graduate School.

"It's exciting to win this award," Privette told Sonnier. "It lets you know that your work doesn't go unnoticed and that you are valuable to your school and the whole UMB community. I'm still telling people I was Employee of the Month, and that happened five months ago. When this conference is over, you should call all of your family, tell them what you just won, and then demand that they fix you dinner for two weeks! Because you deserve it."

— Lou Cortina



# Human Resource Services

## Gallery of Winners

### Jill Hamilton



For a year, Jill Hamilton, MSW '01, attended the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) Employee of the Month meetings as a member of the UMB Staff Senate, cheering on colleagues from across the University and their many accomplishments.

On Aug. 8, it was Hamilton's turn to be recognized. UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, surprised the contracts and grants specialist from the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy (UMSOP), whose term as vice president of the Staff Senate ended this summer, with the news that she was UMB's August Employee of the Month. He was joined on the videoconference by Hamilton's UMSOP colleagues and many members of the Staff Senate who nominated her for the award.

"I had the pleasure of reading your nomination, and a whole lot of people chimed in singing your praises, and you're certainly deserving of this award," Jarrell told Hamilton.

In her role at UMSOP, Hamilton ensures that the post-award process goes smoothly for faculty in the Department of Practice,

Sciences, and Health Outcomes Research (P-SHOR).

"I do the monitoring and the due diligence with making sure we are spending funds correctly, meeting the deadlines of the sponsors, and keeping our faculty informed of the grant progress on the post-award side," Hamilton said.

She said one of her favorite things about her job is making sure grant sponsors pay invoices, which requires persistence and being deadline-oriented.

"I take great pride in meeting deadlines. If you give it to me, it will be done," Hamilton said. "Getting invoices paid by sponsors can be a challenge, so I enjoy that. I love how there's so much to learn in this job, because we work with so many different sponsors."

Hamilton's supervisor, Megan Young, accounting director, P-SHOR, praised her teamwork.

"She really hit the ground running here on campus. And she's just grown and done wonderful things all across the department and campus," she said. "I'm so grateful I get to work with her every day."

Hamilton said she feels like she makes a difference in her UMSOP role.

“All these little things matter in the puzzle of creating grants and getting the grants. I support the work, so I’m doing good for the world,” she said.

Shortly after Hamilton started working at UMB almost five years ago, she decided to become involved with the Staff Senate. During her tenure from 2019 to 2023, she was a senator, member at large, secretary, and vice president. Her colleagues praised her for her dedication, leadership, and the example she sets.

“Whether it is monitoring the various projects and initiatives that are in development, stuffing bags for donations, engaging with leadership in the President’s Boardroom, or hopping on a call to talk strategy, Jill is the consummate leader. It was a boon to have her skill set on advancing UMB through the Staff Senate,” said Staff Senate President Aaron Graham, JD, associate director of career development at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, who led the nomination process for Hamilton.

“Jill’s work ethic and commitment to excellence are outstanding. She consistently goes beyond to ensure that her work is completed to the highest standard, and she is highly regarded by her colleagues and peers. Her attention to detail, mind for structure, and battery of procedural knowledge are just some examples of her abilities.”

Taylor DeBoer, MA, assistant director, the Graduate Research Innovation District, and Staff Senate member at large, agreed.

“Jill is an extremely organized, motivated, and detail-oriented leader. She’s always prepared and never skips a beat,” he said. “Working with her through the Staff Senate has been one of the joys of my time at UMB. She sweats every detail of every project with thoroughness and thoughtfulness.”

Tim Casey, MBA, PMP, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, director, Business Analytics and Assessment, University of Maryland School of Dentistry, transitioned to Staff Senate secretary after Hamilton had held the role.

“In addition to her effectiveness, Jill has an irrepressibly cheerful outlook,” he said. “I have heard repeated pronouncements of ‘Teamwork makes the dream work’ and ‘We have a strategic plan. ... It’s called doing things.’ As humorous as they are, Jill lives these mantras and maintains a continuous direct course toward mission success at UMB. Jill supports routine and special events on campus and has devoted innumerable hours as a volunteer in support of the mission and vision of the University.”

Hamilton said meeting people during her time on the Staff Senate was a highlight and added that she always felt heard by UMB’s leadership.

“Shared governance is real on our campus with our president and our leaders,” she said. “Because we advocate, it doesn’t mean they’re going to change everything, but they do listen. You may not get what you want, but they are listening to the concerns and doing the best they can for our staff.”

Hamilton is serving as a co-chair for Employee Well-Being on the Future of Work Committee. She also served on the yearlong Core Values Implementation Planning Committee, which is fitting since many of her colleagues said that she truly embodies the University’s core values.

“When I think of core values, I think of Jill Hamilton,” said Karen Park, MA, MBA, director of strategic projects and chief of staff to the chief business and finance officer/senior vice president for administration and finance who served with Hamilton on the core values committee.

Hamilton, who will receive a plaque, a letter of commendation, and an extra \$250 in her next paycheck, thanked her Staff Senate colleagues who nominated her for the award.

“I’m just really excited to have won the award. We work with phenomenal people who do phenomenal things,” she said. “I’m in the company of amazing, hardworking staff. I feel honored to be a part of people who improve the human condition. If I can make it so people get their grants and they get more funding, and it makes it so something can be discovered and help make the world a better place to be, I’m in.”

# Human Resource Services

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## Gallery of Winners

### Lei Zhang

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Professional. Caring. Enthusiastic. Self-disciplined. And above all, kind.

This is how colleagues describe Lei Zhang, research lab specialist in the Institute of Human Virology's (IHV) Clinical Division at the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM).

"A few months ago, a sports injury forced me off my feet at a time that I was attending in the hospital. Lei understood my situation, borrowed a wheelchair, and pushed me to see patients during Rounds," said her supervisor, Nicholas Stamatou, MD, PhD, associate professor, UMSOM. "This was clearly an example of going well beyond the call of duty. Lei cares about everyone around her."

Stamatou, along with colleagues from IHV and the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) Staff Senate, attended a videoconference with UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, on Sept. 26 to surprise Zhang with the news that she was UMB's September Employee of the Month.

"Your report was glowing," Jarrell said in congratulating Zhang. "It sounds like your lab greatly appreciates you not just for your

lab skills, but also for your personal qualities and caring about people."

As a research assistant in the lab of Stamatou, whose studies are focused on understanding the role of glycosylation in regulating the function of white blood cells in immunity, Zhang manages laboratory animals used in these studies.

"To continue to meet the experiment's needs, I need to take care of enough breeder cages of mice that are deficient in four different genes. Which cages have newborn mice? Which mice are old enough to be weaned?" she said. "There are two to five mice in a cage. Over the past five years, I have taken care of 1,000 cages of experimental mice."

"In addition to breeding the mice, Lei has simplified the process of identifying the mice we need by improving our method of genetically characterizing them," Stamatou said.

Zhang recently met in the lab with the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee's Post-Approval Monitoring team.

“When inspecting our animal room, the investigator exclaimed in amazement, ‘I have never seen such clear marking cards for each cage!’ ” Stamatou said, calling Zhang “a tremendous asset to me, to the lab, and to the University as a whole.”

Zhang, who was a cardiologist in China when she came to the United States 30 years ago and has worked at UMB since 1995, is perhaps best known to her colleagues for her support of mental health and for practicing kindness wherever she goes.

“All I can do is never pass up an opportunity to share my understanding of mental health and the process of self-healing,” she said. “Thirty years ago, I was a cardiology clinician. But I felt more like a psychiatrist. My care, enthusiasm, understanding, and sympathy for my patients were more important than medicine. No matter where I am, mental health thinking is top of mind. Being a doctor or doing scientific research is just my career to support my family. Focusing on mental health is my life’s work.”

Her colleagues call her a joy to work with.

“She always has a smile for someone, always has a kind or encouraging word, and always has energy to spare for everybody,” said Shawnta Privette, MSL, UMB police communications supervisor who serves with Zhang on UMB’s Staff Senate.

Stamatou agreed. “Words cannot describe Lei’s passion for her work and people. She deserves recognition for her daily mental health efforts, most notably after the pandemic. She cares about people in a way that none of us can.”

Zhang says building relationships is her favorite part of her job.

“What I like most in the laboratory is not only providing specific help to young people in scientific research technology, but I don’t miss any opportunity to make interpersonal relationships and increase team cohesion,” she said. “This is how mental health environments are built.”

Zhang, who will receive a plaque, a letter of commendation, and an extra \$250 in her next paycheck, thanked all of her colleagues over the years at UMB for their support.

“Realizing my dream of contributing to humanistic construction is inseparable from the workplace environment. I want to thank every professor and colleague I have worked with for their understanding and tolerance because not everyone can accept my sincerity,” she said.

Stamatou, for one, has appreciated her outlook.

“She said that no matter her position, she must work for herself. At first, I did not understand it. I thought she was working for me. But now I understand better what she meant,” he said. “Lei’s ideal future is to live in an environment of happiness and laughter. Her motivation for living is not fame or wealth but that her existence can make others happy. Those that know Lei appreciate the bright light that her essence beams toward us.”

— Jen Badie

# Human Resource Services

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## Gallery of Winners

### Tom Hockensmith

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When problems occur with a work computer, chances are you hope the person who answers the call for help is patient, knowledgeable, and dependable. And that is how his supervisor, customers, and team describe Tom Hockensmith, MS, executive director, central administration information technology (IT) services, who also is praised as a strong, customer service-driven leader.

Hockensmith was surprised Oct. 5 during a videoconference by University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, with news that he was the University's October Employee of the Month. Jarrell was joined by Peter J. Murray, PhD, CAS, MS, senior vice president for information technology and chief information officer, who is Hockensmith's supervisor, as well as two dozen employees from around the University.

"Tom is somebody I've known well for a variety of reasons, because of IT and his work on the Staff Senate," Jarrell said.

"He's a joy to work with. And so, Tom, we're here to honor you today."

Murray emphasized Hockensmith's customer service.

"Tom is the epitome of customer service and an employee who lives and practices the UMB core values," Murray said. "He provides excellence in service to the people that he supports and promotes a culture of treating UMB students, faculty, staff, colleagues, and co-workers as treasured customers."

"He treats every person with respect and shows empathy for every person's question or issue knowing that it's important to that individual. He's always receptive and polite to individuals and honest and transparent with his communication and support. He doesn't change this persona, even when he's very busy and challenged by work responsibilities."

Hockensmith manages a Center for Information Technology Services (CITS) team of about a dozen employees who keep the computers running for UMB's central administration users such as the President's Office and Human Resource Services. His team does IT security updates, and Hockensmith also oversees the training team.

One of those employees, Deanna Price-Jenkins, senior IT analyst, called Hockensmith "my best resource over the years."

"I know I can come to him with anything, and he helps me with it or directs me in the right direction," she said. "I appreciate Tom for his leadership."

Murray also praised Hockensmith's leadership skills.

"Tom's team really enjoys working for him and with him because he cares about their welfare," Murray said. "He's respectful of his staff's workload and assumes tasks, whether large or small, to help lighten the workload of his colleagues. His leadership results in productive staff members who have positive attitudes and healthy behaviors."

Hockensmith's customers appreciate his willingness to help when problems arise.

"I'm with Public Safety, and everything we do seems like an emergency," said Vanessa Harrington, MS, SHRM-CP, director of security and compliance, UMB Police Department. "If there's a minor IT problem, and we panic, Tom is the voice of calm. He has the patience of a saint, and we appreciate it. He always has the sense of urgency and yet the rationale to say, 'This is going to be OK.' I've seen him in meetings calm us all down and get us through the process, and we greatly appreciate it."

In fact, Hockensmith said his favorite part of the job is helping people. He still occasionally takes calls and helps employees several times a week, though his team primarily handles the day-to-day responsibilities while he manages the big picture.

"It's a team effort to keep the University running, and this is our part," he said. "I enjoy the technology, but I enjoy helping people use it because it can be frustrating and that's what I say that we're here for, to hopefully make it a little less frustrating for people when it doesn't work or if they need help."

Hockensmith said one of the greatest challenges of his job is that technology evolves so quickly.

"It seems like as soon as you help people get familiar with one thing or one way to do something, there's a new thing and a new way to do something," he said. "That constant evolution can make it tricky at times."

But Murray said Hockensmith always is willing to learn those new technologies and pass that knowledge on to his customers.

"Tom is a leader in delivering and supporting technology innovations and teaching his colleagues how to use new systems," Murray said. "He is very willing to learn and embrace new technologies, and he is very patient in working with individuals until they understand how to use these new technologies."

Hockensmith, who has attended several Employee of the Month meetings as secretary of the UMB Staff Senate, said he was overwhelmed and grateful to receive the award.

"It's always great to recognize people. I was shocked and surprised," he said. "I try not to be the person in the limelight."

Hockensmith, who has worked at the University for 18 years, will receive a plaque, a letter of commendation, and an extra \$250 in his next paycheck for the award.

He thanked Murray for his support as well as his team.

"I honestly don't think that I would be where I am without them behind me," Hockensmith said.

— Jen Badie

# Human Resource Services

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## Gallery of Winners

### Carin Cardella

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Carin Cardella, MA, MS, thought nothing of impacting her own work-life balance to help support the well-being of the employees she works with as the public information officer (PIO) of University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) Police and Public Safety.

Cardella has volunteered over the past year on UMB's Future of Work Task Force, which is charged with developing recommendations to leadership related to work flexibility, employee value proposition (why people want to work and remain at UMB), and employee well-being. Cardella initially worked as a member of the Workplace Flexibility Committee because she wanted to be a voice for employees such as police officers, security officers, and police communications operators who don't have the opportunity to telework but whose well-being should be considered in the recommendations.

Because of her support of the committee, she was named its co-chair, working nights and weekends to consolidate its recommendations and support them with research and employee feedback. She read through hundreds of comments

from the Future of Work listening sessions and survey, helping to give a voice to UMB employees in the report.

"Carin quickly became one of the most innovative and supportive members of our group," said Liz Graham, MS, executive director, Thurgood Marshall Law Library, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, who co-chaired the committee with Cardella. "Her ability to boil down a vast number of news articles, research, discussions, survey results, listening session feedback, and more — while also considering employee diversity, functional responsibilities, and equity for the essential on-campus employees she works with — showed her commitment to the well-being of our UMB community."

On Nov. 28, about 50 of Cardella's colleagues from Police and Public Safety, the Future of Work Task Force, and other offices joined UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, to surprise her with the news that she had been named the University's November Employee of the Month.

"Carin is amazing. She keeps me on the straight and narrow with all my communications across campus. We couldn't do this without Carin," said Thomas Leone, MSL, chief of police and assistant vice president for public safety.

As PIO, Cardella manages all communications facets for police and emergency management, which includes social media, the website, media relations, and crisis communications. She also sends out UMB alerts and writes the UMB Police and Public Safety monthly newsletter.

She said those skills were a benefit while working on the task force.

“One of my gifts is the ability to consolidate information, so I took the lead on that aspect of it,” she said. “It almost became a 24/7 thing. I did most of the work outside of my work hours, and I would stay up until 2 in the morning working on the Future of Work report, because I felt it was so critical to the future of our university. I’m proud of the document we put together. We wanted it to be something people would want to read and was engaging and easy for people to understand.”

The task force’s 168-page document was presented in August to leadership, which formed a work group to review the recommendations. The next step will be to hold town halls with employees in early 2024.

“She showed a commitment to continuous improvement and collaboration. She advocated for UMB’s lowest-paid employees, who are often required to be on campus full time. She created recommendations to ensure work-life harmony and healthy behaviors for her fellow employees,” said Graham, who nominated Cardella for the award. “And most of all, Carin promoted open communication, empathy, and respect with everyone we spoke with. Her work will improve the human condition for our UMB employees for decades to come.”

Dawn M. Rhodes, DBA, chief business and finance officer and senior vice president, who oversees Police and Public Safety and is one of the executive sponsors of the Future of Work Task Force, praised Cardella for her willingness to help.

“You truly give and give and give. Your technical skills are beyond reproach. But what really sits with me is that you stretch yourself to help so many other people,” Rhodes told Cardella during the videoconference. “I am always amazed when I find out that you spent some time working on a project for this unit or that unit outside police and the Office of Emergency Management. And I have no idea with what time you’re able to do that. You truly are able as a sole unit to use multiple vehicles to effectively communicate.”

One way she has been willing to help her community has been during two tragedies that the Baltimore City Fire Department suffered in the past two years. Cardella has been deployed to the Maryland Incident Management Team as a PIO supporting the Linden Heights Avenue line of duty deaths this year and the Stricker Street line of duty deaths last year because of her extensive training and experience in crisis and emergency situations. She has helped to coordinate the response to ensure that the right information is disseminated to the public, the news media, and the fire department.

“I’m glad that I could be there to play a very small role in this response, but it’s really about the firefighters who died and their families and the community that continues to grieve,” she said. “It’s the impact that we can have when we work together and bring all of our talents to support the larger community.”

As UMB’s Police and Public Safety PIO, Cardella said she thrives on her job being different every day.

“Even if I think I know how my day is going to go, it could completely be upended in the middle of the day,” she said. “I thrive in the chaos. I get the 2 a.m. wakeup calls, I get called back into work sometimes at 6 o’clock at night after I’ve already gotten home. But I think those moments are when you work your best. We all come together as a team. Everybody’s working together toward a common goal. And I just really love that.”

Cardella, who has worked at the University for more than four years, will receive a plaque, a letter of commendation, and an extra \$250 in her next paycheck. She thanked Graham and the members of the Future of Work Task Force as well as Jarrell, Leone, Rhodes, Christopher Stanton, MS, acting executive director of emergency management, and Jonathan Bratt, MS, assistant vice president, Office of Enterprise Resilience, for their support and leadership.

She said she was grateful and overwhelmed to win the award.

“That you’ve all taken time out of your day to be here for me is just really touching, so thank you all for making me better and for supporting me and lifting me up,” she told the colleagues who gathered from all over the University during the videoconference.

She said building those relationships is one of the things she is most proud of.

“The Future of Work Task Force allows me to break out of some of those silos that we so often have here at UMB,” she said. “I’ve met so many incredible people that I would not have otherwise met. We can leverage those relationships into a better work product, but also I think it really speaks to the well-being aspect of our university when we’re all working together.”





# Human Resource Services

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## Gallery of Winners

### Debra Ruffin

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Debra Ruffin combines cleanliness with friendliness in her job as a custodian in the Department of Environmental Services (EVS) at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB). A 27-year employee of UMB, she is committed to providing excellent housekeeping service and doing it with a smile.

This was clear when Ruffin, who is affectionately known as Ms. Debbie, was honored as UMB's December 2023 Employee of the Month during a videoconference Jan. 9. UMB President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, led off the ceremony, informing Ruffin of the honor and thanking her for her exemplary work ethic and sunny disposition.

"Your colleagues tell me that you do great work, particularly at the BioPark and the Community Engagement Center," he told Ruffin. "You have a number of traits that are wonderful. Among those are your commitment to UMB's core values, which is really important, and your ability to get people to work together in an amicable way. We need that so much these days."

Bill Joyner, JD, MSW, assistant vice president of community engagement and partnerships, Office of Community Engagement, nominated Ruffin for the award, saying, "Ms. Debbie is a stellar member of the UMB community who exemplifies all of UMB's core values and looks out for the well-being of employees and visitors to the BioPark and the Community Engagement Center.

"She has saved the day at the Community Engagement Center more than a dozen times in the past year," Joyner added. "The building's basement bathrooms have been experiencing sewage flooding between one and four times a month. Ms. Debbie consistently responds to our emergency pleas for help, ensuring that the space is sanitized and safe for visitors to participate in our programming at the building. It's a herculean task."

Joyner also said that Ruffin is a "model of diplomacy" who mentors new hires and is considered a leader on her EVS team.

"I have watched Ms. Debbie resolve conflicts and defuse tension between employees effortlessly," Joyner said. "When asked if she needs help, she usually responds, 'No, everything's OK,' and proceeds to manage the issue — often using humor."

Denise Meyer, director of EVS, told Ruffin: “We appreciate what you do every day and the sheer joy that you bring to the campus. I’m blessed to get to see you more often than many others do. I certainly appreciate you and your commitment to EVS and to UMB’s core values.”

Among Ruffin’s many duties, she cleans restrooms, labs, and offices, does high and low dusting, mops floors, and takes out the trash.

“I just like to make sure my areas of responsibility are nice and clean and sanitized,” she said. “I really just want to make sure everybody’s needs are met. If someone needs me for anything, I am there to help them, to be courteous, and to have a smile each day. If I can talk with someone for a few minutes and make a little joke or two, that brightens my day.”

The feeling is mutual, said Mark Drymala, MS, assistant director-administrative, EVS.

“Ms. Debbie is incredible. Her positivity is contagious,” he said. “Every time I see Ms. Debbie, she is smiling — and that brings a smile to my face as well. And she does such great work.”

Ruffin will receive a certificate, a letter of commendation, and an extra \$250 in her next paycheck as rewards for her Employee of the Month recognition. What will she do with the bonus? Share it with her colleagues, of course.

“I’m going to treat my co-workers to lunch, whatever they want,” she said, adding that she appreciates the support from Joyner and working with EVS colleagues such as Darlene Watkins, Juanita Dubose, and Candice Taylor. “I love working for UMB, and I’ve met some really beautiful people here. That’s what has kept me here all these years. I really love the people and what I’m doing.”

— Lou Cortina