

The Lori Ruffier Legacy Award: **DRAFT**

Lori Ruffier brought the idea of a "Montana Schools Recruitment Project" to the Montana Council of Administrators of Special Education, MCASE, in 2005. While she was working as a Special Education Director, her own need to hire a specialist for a child in a rural school lit the spark that became a systems change that would stand the test of time. It is inherent in the character of Lori Ruffier that she built a team of dedicated individuals to work together on this idea. A committee was formed, MCASE and the Office of Public Instruction Special Education Division provided financial support and ultimately School Administrators, SAM, provided operational support.

At the foundation of the *Montana Schools Recruitment Project* was Lori's unwavering philosophy around what it takes to recruit and hopefully retain, special education personnel in Montana schools. She believed in the handshake, face to face time, relationship, returning phone calls, remembering the personal details of the individual seeking a position, and transparency and honesty about the challenges when working in our state. More importantly, her love for Montana, public schools, and her incredible passion for children with exceptionalities that require special education services left an imprint on all those she met at career fairs, conferences and universities. "The Montana Lady" made a difference for many who have found careers in our schools, who are leaving their own legacy and now call Montana home.

Beyond recruiting she has worked collaboratively with the Governor's Office, Office of Public Instruction, Higher Education and Montana Schools to effect change in loan forgiveness, supervision stipends to meet requirements for new-to-the-field providers, marketing plans for school districts that supported recruitment and retention and growing our own specialists in our home communities through the "Home Grown" career fairs.

The recipient of *The Lori Ruffier Legacy Award* will be in their first year of employment, have been recruited to their position by the Montana Schools Recruitment Project and nominated by the Montana Recruitment Project in collaboration with their school district. The recipient will be recognized at the Spring MCASE/MCEC conference and receive a check for five hundred dollars in hopes of offsetting a challenge due to moving costs, relocation, joining their state or national organization or participate in professional development.

******* I would like to surprise Lori with this award and appreciate your discretion when talking to others about it*******

I imagine the plaque to stay in the SAM office and to be the type where a new recipient could be added to it annually.