

USU's Top Employees Honored



(left to right) Marina Hall (Outstanding Faculty), President Albrecht, Terri Lee Gass (Outstanding Classified Employee) and John D. Mortensen (Outstanding Professional Employee).

Utah State University's top employees were honored at the Employee Recognition Luncheon March 30. Three individuals were recognized for outstanding accomplishments in their individual employee categories — classified, professional and faculty. The luncheon also honored USU employees marking 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and 35 years of service. Two individuals were recognized for 40 years of service — Clinton Hovey, an manager in Facilities Operations, and Alan W. Shaw, professor in the department of electrical and computer engineering.

Employees who took top honors were evaluated on contributions to the university and the community. Service, excellence and personal traits that reflect well upon their departments and the university are also considered. Two finalists are recognized in each category and a third is named outstanding employee of the year.

Top honors went to Terri Lee Gass, John D. Mortensen and Marina Hall.

Gass is Classified Outstanding Employee of the Year.

Gass is the primary staff assistant in the office of teacher education, licensing and graduation and has worked at USU 12 years. She has contact with multiple university departments, as well as the Utah State Office of Education. Through her efforts, 700 undergraduate and graduate students are admitted into the educator licensure program each year. She also recommends upwards of 650 graduates for their educator license annually.

"Utah State University has long been a place where friendly, helpful service is not just a slogan but a commitment," her nomination states. "When we think of those who truly personify the positive and dynamic spirit of this institution, we immediately think of Terri Gass. Terri goes out of her way to help everyone. ... She always goes the extra mile in all she does."

The two finalists in the Classified Employee area were Suzette Alder, staff assistant IV in the management and human resources department, and Suzanne Thorpe, staff assistant III in the office of Multicultural Student Services.

Mortensen is the Professional Outstanding Employee of the Year.

In his role as director of University Advising and Transfer Services, Mortensen is

instrumental in overseeing a number of initiatives, particularly in the emphasis on improving student recruitment and retention. Under his leadership, a new, centralized advising and transfer center was created, where undeclared students can find assistance as they explore degree options.

“John is known as a diligent and caring supervisor of the employees and students who work in his office,” his award citation stated. “Good communication is a hallmark of John’s career. His philosophy is one of inclusion.”

The two finalists in the Professional Employee category were Star Coulbrooke, assistant director of the Writing Center in the department of English, and Beth H. Smith, budget office for the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station.

Outstanding Faculty Member of the Year is Marina Hall of the English department.

Hall joined the English department in 1992 as a lecturer. After nearly a decade with the department, she proposed adding new responsibilities to her role, including public education and outreach.

“Few humanities departments have someone who has the ability and initiative to forge connections between the department, the campus and the community,” the award citation said. “Marina understands that mission, and as a result, her responsibilities have grown steadily over time.”

Hall’s work is focused on bringing the university to local and state communities. She initiated, and is the driving force behind, KUSU’s radio program “Synecoché,” which broadcasts public readings of literature to a wide audience. Hall has been instrumental in documenting the work and life of former USU faculty member and Utah Poet Laureate Ken Brewer.

“Some of Marina’s most impressive personal traits are her commitment to professional development, positive attitude and enthusiasm,” her citation stated. “She is the model of the sort of dedication, loyalty and creativity that Utah State values.”

The two finalists in the faculty category were Timothy A. Gilbertson, associate professor of biology, and Charles Hawkins, professor in the aquatic, watershed and earth resources department.

Nominations for the awards are solicited campus wide. Two representatives from each employee category are appointed by the university president to review all nominations. Two finalists and the top employee are then selected. All receive cash awards and an award plaque.