

featured

CASA celebrates volunteers at 31st annual Recognition Banquet

By Nick Fenley Sun Staff Writer
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(From left) CASA Coordinator Veronica Davis, CASA of the Year honoree Barbara Legan, and CASA Coordinator S Garrison pose at the banquet.

Photo by Nick Fenley/Yuma Sun

Local Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteers recently poured into the Yuma Civic Center for the 31st annual CASA Recognition Banquet.

CASA Coordinator Veronica Davis explained that the event is a way to highlight volunteers' hard work.

"Every year, we like to have an event to recognize the hard work that our CASA volunteers do to support the children in our community," Davis told the Yuma Sun. "All of our children are in the foster care system. However, sometimes we will appoint a CASA to a child who is in the delinquency system and may need additional support."

Sometimes we have children in both systems, so those children are always our priority in terms of assigning a volunteer.”

“Once a year, we celebrate everything that our volunteers do. It’s also National Volunteer Appreciation Month, so we take advantage of that,” fellow CASA Coordinator Sandy Garrison added.

After attendees enjoyed a tasty lunch and mingled with one another, Davis and Garrison delivered opening remarks before segueing to awards. The most prestigious honor was the CASA of the Year Award, which went to Barbara Legan – a CASA volunteer for the past seven years.

“I was totally shocked! But it’s an honor,” Legan expressed after receiving the award.

Here’s the rundown of the other CASA volunteers who received awards at the banquet:

- Rookie of the Year: Sophia Cazares
- Judges Appreciation Award for Outstanding Advocacy: Jennifer Crowley and Nancy Powell.
- Roadrunner Award: KC Zargarian (7,802 miles driven).
- Scholar Award: Chris O’Brien (75.5 training hours).

Judge Levi Gunderson spoke at the event, and he told the Yuma Sun that CASA volunteers “are a great help within our juvenile court system.”

“It’s nice to be able to be involved in an event like this where they are recognized for their dedication to Yuma County’s vulnerable children, and I’m really honored to be a part of this type of celebration,” Gunderson said.

Juvenile Justice Center Director Edward Gilligan expressed similar sentiments.

“This is really an important event for us. It’s a recognition event that honors the contributions of our CASA volunteers. Those are folks who are advocates for children who have become involved in the child-dependency process in the state,” he shared. “It’s a tremendous amount of work, both in a formal process of providing reports to a court, but also in terms of constantly being available and connecting. These volunteers in our community are essential, and these people do an incredible job.”

Afterward, CASA volunteers took photos and continued celebrating their efforts while also gearing up for another year of advocacy.

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