

'I love story time,' says Annette Mahony

By LAURA HAMPSON

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Annette Mahony, a media center paraprofessional at Columbia City Elementary, was named 2012 School-Related Employee of the Year Thursday. Mahony, who has worked for the county 11 years, was selected from 14 other school employees for the award.

"It was nice to be recognized by the people I work with," said Mahony, after the awards ceremony and luncheon held at the Lake City Church of Christ. Due to budget cuts, Columbia City had to cut a position, said Lana Boone, Columbia City Elementary principal. Instead of losing a teaching position, the media specialist position was cut and Mahony stepped up to take over the responsibility.

Mahony also tutors kindergartners and reads to classes. "I love story time," she said.

There's never a monotonous moment in the media center, she said.

Normally a school media center has a media specialist and a paraprofessional to check out and re-shelve books, help students and teachers find books and manage equipment. Instead, Mahony and several volunteers make it work.

"I think it's wonderful," said Boone of the award. "She works so hard." Mahony doesn't get rattled easy and volunteers to participate in school-wide activities, Boone said. "Schools could not run without school support personnel," said Dorothy Spradley, volunteer and education marketing coordinator for the district. "They are the heart of our schools." The program, in its 22nd year, recognizes education support personnel for their contributions to their schools and communities. Employees at each school and district worksite nominate and vote for a school related employee of the year. Antonio Harris, the 2011 School-Related Employee of the Year, said he had a hard time choosing among the 15 nominees as a member of the recognition evaluation committee. Harris said Mahony went above and beyond her job at the Columbia City media center. "She blew me away," he said. Also serving on the committee was Doyle Crews, Columbia County Property Appraiser; Antonia Robinson, Florida Gateway College Take Stock In Children coordinator; Cheryl Morgan, retired Columbia Bank branch

manager; and Barbara Ann Carpenter, 1996 school-related employee of the year. Employee of the Year winners from each county will go on to a regional level competition and the regional winner will advance to a statewide competition. Mayor Stephen Witt presented Mahony with a key to the city. She also received \$250 from the school board and \$200 from the state Department of Education. Each nominee received \$125 from the school board and a goodie bag with gifts donated by local business. Spradley said none of the businesses she contacted for donations turned her down. "This community supports education," she said. The school district has about 700 support personnel such as teacher aides, bookkeepers, secretaries, bus driver, food service staff, and maintenance workers. The 15 nominees had a combined 172 years of service to the district. Nominees are: Patricia Graves, clerk typist at Challenge Learning Center; Linda Charlene Taylor, data processing clerk at Columbia High School; Jeannie Free, Title 1 parent involvement

paraprofessional at Eastside Elementary; Anthony Perry, paraprofessional at Five Points Elementary; Stacy Tusing, ESE paraprofessional at Fort White Elementary; William T. Highland, security officer at Fort White Middle/High; Janet Hostetler, secretary and bookkeeper at Lake City Middle; Carol Lynne Hirsh, student care attendant at Melrose Park Elementary; Ella LeBlanc, student care attendant at Niblack Elementary; Dawnielle Cheran Burns, nurse at Pinemount Elementary; Betty Wilson, custodian at Richardson Middle; Shannon Bishop, paraprofessional at Summers Elementary; Kelly Erking, paraprofessional at Westside Elementary; and David Monroe, custodian at Columbia County School District Administrative Complex.