

For Immediate Release:

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Pana, Illinois: As a community bank, Peoples Bank & Trust recognizes the value of volunteerism in our communities. To recognize, commend and promote the volunteerism, Peoples Bank & Trust has established a program to recognize outstanding community members for their volunteer efforts of improvement to our community.

Cindy Denning has been chosen as our current Volunteer of the Quarter for her work with the Smart Buddy Mentoring Program in the Pana School District. Cindy has served as coordinator of the program for the past 10 years. The Smart Buddy mentoring program was started around 15 years ago by Pana district's previous Superintendent, Dr. David Lett, other district staff, and community members. Over the years, school staff members have also become volunteers. The program consists of teachers, nurses, bankers, construction workers, law enforcement officers, business owners, pastors, librarians, and retirees as volunteers. Cindy said, "I can honestly say that being the coordinator over the last 10 years has given me the opportunity to meet the most amazing, selfless people in this community. The recognition that I am receiving should go to them for their continuous commitment to the children in this school district."

Mentors in the SMART Buddy program meet with their "buddies" (at-risk students in grades K -5) 30-60 minutes a week during the school year. The mentor normally (but not always) begins working with a child in grades Kindergarten or 1st grade. Then that same buddy pair stays together until 6th grade or higher where they transition into the M2G program (grades 6-12). The overall goal is for the mentor to encourage their buddy by exemplifying positive words and values to them during their time together. There is a waiting list of at-risk students that need mentors so new volunteers are always needed. Please contact Cindy for more details through email at cdenning@panaschools.com or by phone at Washington School (217-562-7500).

Cindy and her husband, Jeff, have been married for 34 years. They have 4 adult children (5 counting their daughter-in-law) that bring them great joy. They also have 4 foreign exchange "daughters" they hosted in previous years and 5 buddies from Pana's two mentoring programs that they consider as family. As well as being the program coordinator for the Pana Unit #8's Smart Buddy mentoring program (K - 5), Cindy is a full-time math intervention teacher at Washington School for students in grades K -2.

In honor of Cindy's volunteer work with the Smart Buddy Program, Peoples Bank & Trust has made a donation to the program and Cindy's name will be placed on a plaque displayed at the Bank.

Peoples Bank & Trust is an independent Community Bank with ten offices located in Pana, Taylorville, Altamont, Tower Hill, Charleston, Springfield, Morrisonville, Palmyra, Waverly and White Hall. Peoples is a full service bank offering outstanding customer service to consumers, small business, and farmers in Central Illinois. People First Bancshares, Inc., with corporate offices in Pana, Illinois, is the holding company for Peoples Bank & Trust.