

Nomination Statement

Please also see attachments: 3 letters from: Christine Wiedinmyer (CIRES Associate Director for Science), Linda Pendergrass (CIRES Event Coordinator), Veronica Vaida (CIRES Researcher)

This Outstanding Performance Award (OPA) nomination in the Administrative Service category is for David Zakavec of CIRES Information Technology (IT). Dave provides outstanding customer service to CIRES employees. Every day, he helps researchers at NOAA and CU overcome technical difficulties and focus on their research. He has saved scientists hundreds of hours by efficiently fixing computer problems. In the event a problem cannot be quickly fixed, he creatively finds alternative solutions. He has saved critical scientific data that was not backed up and the loss of which would have been catastrophic. When CIRES employees moved to remote work because of the pandemic, he made this transition a smooth one. His seven years at CIRES have led to support requests getting much more quickly resolved and have prevented many such requests in the first place. It is no accident that CIRES researchers are relatively free from the IT problems that plague other organizations. CIRES IT provides exceptional customer service, and a big reason for this is Dave Zakavec. Dave's attitude is always calm and helpful. He never makes anyone feel stupid for asking questions, and he always goes out of his way to find the best solution. This responsiveness sometimes makes more work for him. For example, if CU's Office of Information Technology (OIT) implements a new requirement or suffers a data breach, CIRES employees sometimes complain to Dave even though the issue is a CU-wide one. It would be quicker and entirely appropriate for Dave to direct these employees to the OIT help desk. This is what many in the IT industry would do; IT departments often shorten their own resolution times by elevating tickets to another department or referring the customer to vendor support. Dave almost never does this. Unless it's impossible, Dave resolves tickets himself. He provides a friendly, personal point of contact for everyone in CIRES. Dave also excels in providing auto-visual support for conferences, workshops, and events. He has therefore considerably broadened the impact of CIRES research on the wider community. Despite his skills, Dave typically deflects praise and does not call attention to himself. He would never tell you that he is much faster and better than most IT support specialists. But he is, as the following section will demonstrate. He has contributed as much to CIRES as anyone in the organization. Being honored with an OPA Award would be a fitting recognition of Dave's service.

Criteria

Criteria 1: Considerable improvements to operational, technical, or business processes such as lab maintenance and development that aid in research, teaching, or outreach at CIRES.

Dave joined CIRES IT in 2016. Together with the recently appointed CIRES IT Director, Nate Campbell, he implemented a process for quickly responding to customer support requests. Previously, tickets had often remained open for months. Dave made it a point to respond to customers personally within a few minutes of receiving their request. Seven years later, he still does this. CIRES has grown larger, and the move to hybrid work has resulted in many more tickets for Zoom issues, unstable VPN connections, and so on. But Dave still acknowledges support requests personally almost as soon as they come in. His median first response time is three minutes. For comparison, the IT industry average is over seven hours. His quickness sets the standard for the CIRES IT department as a whole, which averages under ten minutes for the first response. Dave's technical expertise is both broad and deep. He is equally adept at handling hardware failures, website updates, and equipment purchases. When OIT had a data breach, Dave was the one ensuring that CIRES IT's forty-plus secondary accounts had their passwords updated within hours.

His commitment to customer service and his IT expertise are evident in the numbers. He resolved 1,500 tickets in the last year, handling almost half of the requests that the nine-member IT department receives (see supplemental materials). He keeps in close contact with customers and sent over 6,500 responses to customers in the last year alone. Since the beginning of his time at CIRES, Dave has closed over 9,400 IT tickets. If these ticket submissions were split equally among full-time CIRES employees, Dave would be responsible for the following: Fixing 1,140 problems for NOAA's Physical Sciences Lab, which studies climate, weather, and atmosphere-ocean processes; Fixing 1,020 problems for NOAA's Chemical Sciences Lab, which investigates air quality, cloud physics, and climate; Fixing 950 problems for the National Centers for Environmental Information, the archive for critical environmental data; Fixing another 2,000+ problems for the other Boulder NOAA divisions (GML, GSL, and SWPC); Fixing 1,340 problems for the National Snow and Ice Data Center; Fixing 1,270 problems for CIRES Finance, Communications, and HR teams, so these groups can continue to publicize CIRES research and submit grants on behalf of CIRES researchers; Fixing 1,640 problems for CIRES on-campus faculty researchers and their supervisees; Clearly, Dave's reach is broad. Some of the above problems may have been relatively simple to fix, but others were not. On multiple occasions, for example, he has rescued scientific data from when older instrument computers have failed. Dr. Veronica Vaida, a Professor of Chemistry and CIRES Fellow, noted that Dave rescued her research group from a situation like this (see letter of recommendation). Literally, no one else at CU was able to help. Thanks to Dave's intervention, however, the data were recovered. Both Dr. Vaida and her graduate students were extremely grateful. The quality and efficiency with which Dave approached and solved the problem saved an important research project. Dr. Vaida

said, concluding, Dave Zakavec is an exceptional partner for my group and me in teaching and research.

Criteria 2: Development or improvement of a service that increases the effectiveness, efficiency, or quality of CIRES work and operations like assistance with grants, travel reimbursements, purchasing, building and equipment maintenance, or non-scientific software development.

One of Dave's first innovations when he joined CIRES in 2016 was the loaner laptop program. Before Dave created this program, CIRES researchers faced a big loss in productivity if their laptops were sent in for repair. It was inevitable that problems like faulty keyboards or failed hard drives would arise, problems that could not be fixed in house. But sending a computer in for repair was sometimes barely worth the lost downtime. If the user happened to have a personal computer available, they could transfer their software and data to that computer themselves. If not, they were out of luck sometimes for several weeks. The loaner laptop program changed all this. Dave started the program with five laptops. Scientists could borrow these laptops when their own went in for repair, and Dave helped sync the user's software and data to the loaner. (For Macs, the syncing was relatively easy to accomplish with TimeMachine, but PCs required a more manual process.) When the user's original computer was returned, Dave then synced the software and data from the loaner back to the original laptop. This process meant almost no downtime from repairs. The loaner laptop program has proven extremely popular, and CIRES IT now supplies up to 20 loaner laptops at any given time. In addition to providing the loaners, Dave facilitates the rest of the repair experience. He keeps excellent records of which machines are under warranty. It is usually he, rather than the customer, who contacts the manufacturer to inquire about technical issues and repair turnaround times. This yields big efficiencies of scale. Dave knows exactly which numbers to call and what likely causes of issues may be. Dave even helps with transport. During the height of the pandemic, Dave drove to employee residences two to three times a week to pick up or deliver computer equipment. This level of service is virtually unheard of. Because of all his efforts, he has saved CIRES researchers from many frustrating hours getting their computers fixed or replaced. They can spend that time on science instead. Probably no one at CIRES has done more to help increase efficiency for research scientists than Dave. Dr. Veronica Vaida, who was mentioned earlier, recently benefited from Dave's help and the loaner laptop program. Dr. Vaida is a prominent scientist who belongs to both the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. While she was teaching a Physical Chemistry course, her computer began having intermittent problems. Dr. Vaida reported, "Dave] worked with me at some lengths to identify a process that would allow me to continue teaching and research

while the computer is being fixed.” She called this assistance invaluable in allowing her to continue her job (see reference letter).

Criteria 3: Providing initiatives to advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), Human Resources programs, or other administrative divisions that support effective and invaluable work and operations at CIRES.

Dave’s audio-visual (A/V) tech support is essential for promoting the excellent research happening at CIRES. He supports large events such as Rendezvous and on-campus conferences, and he also serves as an advisor to CIRES employees running events themselves. Dave is able to enter any stressful situation and bring a calm to the room while pragmatically correcting any issue. From securing a loose cable to rebooting an entire audio system, Dave approaches each problem with equanimity and always finds a solution. He gives all his customers this level of service. Whether the event includes the President of University or just a group of people having a hybrid meeting, he will prepare and make sure each event goes smoothly. He has an incredible depth of knowledge with hybrid events and the equipment necessary to support them. He is also able to learn new systems quickly and can adjust rapidly to the ever-changing hybrid landscape. Dave has been critical to the reintegration of the CIRES administrative and research staff on the CU campus after COVID, making sure all of our meeting spaces were up to the task of providing seamless hybrid meetings. These skills have also promoted the visibility of CIRES research to the wider community. As CIRES’s Director of Education and Outreach, Anne Gold, summarizes: Dave has provided outstanding support for various outreach events and activities. He has made live streaming and webinars possible and has been a terrific and reliable advocate. Dave is always ready to help with tech support. It feels like he always goes above and beyond in his contributions, is thoughtful, friendly and reliable, and for live events brings the calm into the room (virtual or in-person) that is needed for everyone to thrive.

It is a tremendous pleasure to work with Dave and I am always excited when he picks up an IT ticket because I know that he will provide excellent support, be willing to brainstorm creative approaches to challenges and be there to support us when we need him. When I think of an outstanding example of service orientation, Dave is an excellent example. He is a tremendous asset to CIRES and well-deserving of the administrative service award.