

LAKE COUNTRY NOW

Mukwonago Chief

Mukwonago High School teacher named National SAVE Adviser of the Year



Even as Sarah Dianich's classroom filled with Mukwonago High School administrators, SAVE (Students Against Violence Everywhere) officers, balloons, and her daughter Julia carrying flowers — who should have been in class at Park View Middle School - even then Dianich didn't know what the fuss was about.

She thought maybe it was something for a student — she wasn't sure what was happening. Not until Mukwonago High School SAVE Vice President Paige Fix announced Dianich being chosen as the National SAVE adviser of the year did Dianich realize the honor bestowed upon her.

"It was very surprising. It was very sweet," said Dianich.

On March 12, at the National Youth SAVE Summit in North Carolina, MHS English teacher and SAVE adviser Dianich was announced as the National SAVE Adviser of the Year. With this recognition, Dianich will serve on the board of directors for the National SAVE group and write a monthly column, which she hopes will give her a chance to showcase the great work her group has done in Mukwonago.

"It shows how much they (students) do," Dianich said. "I wouldn't do anything I did if not for all of their excellent ideas, their passion. They're so committed."

Yet, as Mukwonago SAVE President Nicole Bugiel waved tears away, she told Dianich, "I have such a passion for this because of you."

In a [video shot by Dianich's colleague Peg Meddaugh](#), Fix explained how Dianich, through her "hard work, determination and huge heart," has "influenced countless people, making a huge difference in the world and your community a much safer place."

Fix, a senior and active member of SAVE, has worked closely with Dianich during her high school career.

"It astounds me how hard she works and how her drive for helping people has made such an impact on our students, school, and community," Fix said in an email. "I have learned so much from her and only hope I can one day be as influential of a person as she is."

SAVE co-adviser Marilyn Toshner was happy to see Dianich win the award. She credits Dianich for bringing programs to MHS to create awareness to differences among people and how school violence affects a community, as well as developing activities that bring awareness to the effect social issues have on students.

"I have had the privilege of working with Sarah as her co-adviser of SAVE for the past eight years and she definitely deserves this award," said Toshner in an email. "Sarah is an inspiration to many students and staff at MHS."

Toshner said Dianich "encourages students to be positive by being a positive role model herself."

"Sarah has gone above and beyond her role as a teacher/SAVE Adviser to make a positive climate in her classroom and in the schools in the Mukwonago School District," Toshner added.

Tenth year

Dianich started SAVE 10 years ago after learning the principal at Weston High School in Cazenovia, where she started teaching, was killed trying to stop a shooter with multiple guns who had entered the school.

"He was a hero. He saved a lot of lives that day," Dianich recalled. "It was terrifying for everyone involved."

When she came back to MHS after learning about the shooting, she felt like she had to do something and began researching.

"What can we do to be proactive, to prevent that kind of thing from ever happening here? Because every school always says, it's never going to happen here," Dianich said. "I think we learned with Columbine and Sandy Hook and everything else, we know that's simply not the case. It could happen anywhere."

While there is no way to prevent school violence, SAVE groups try to minimize violence as much as possible, Dianich explained.

In the years since Dianich started SAVE at MHS, the focus of the organization has evolved from trying to prevent anger and violence from bullying to "something else entirely," although preventing bullying is still a major part of the group's efforts.

"Creating a culture is really the only way you prevent bullying," said Dianich.

Over the years, Dianich said SAVE has contributed to other efforts at the high school to create a culture of respect.

MHS SAVE

At a national level SAVE has differently monthly focuses. MHS SAVE focuses on what works for the Mukwonago community. Last year cyberbullying was a big issue. An idea from the officers grew into a huge event for the school.

"All the ideas come from them," said Dianich. "Mrs. Toshner and I just facilitate."

One of proudest achievements for MHS SAVE was when [Sydney Gilbert was named Student of the Year](#) by the national association last year.

Dianich said the group has transformed over the years because of "instrumental leaders" like Gilbert and the current officers, Bugiel, Fix and Madisyn Fairchild.

"These kids have so many amazing ideas. They have their fingers on the pulse of the student body," said Dianich. "They just change the game and we keep building on all the ideas until it becmbecomesamazing thing."

While Dianich felt the Mukwonago SAVE group deserved national recognition for their hard work this year, her award puts the group "on the map," she admitted.

Toshner said due to Dianich's success with SAVE at MHS, she has helped the elementary schools and middle school start their own SAVE groups.

"Sarah's optimism toward life and her loyalty toward family, friends and her students is inspiring," said Toshner. "She is a positive role model as to how people should live their daily lives. Sarah is an outstanding SAVE leader who is well deserving of this award."