



The 2023 Driving Force Award

To enhance the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning's special 45th anniversary celebration, the **Driving Force Award** has been created to honor those individuals who labor so diligently to ensure that the mission of the KUCRL moves forward in a way to optimize its impact. Researchers and professional developers get praise (and rightfully so) for the important work they do. However, what they accomplish and get credit for wouldn't be possible if it wasn't for those individuals who labor so hard to support them – and with few exceptions they do this critical work behind the scenes and out of limelight. They take initiative, are adaptable and are always ready to assist – regardless of the cost to them. The positive energy that they provide to the culture and work of the center is absolutely essential. Indeed, it's the **driving force**. Quite simply, without their contributions, the Center would not be able to accomplish its mission.

The 2023 Driving Force Awardees are
Peony Allen, Jeannie Heil, and Mona Tipton!

When asked to describe a time when either Mona, Peony, or Jeannie was outstanding in their support of the mission and staff of the CRL, I was unable to identify a specific time or activity to share. That's because every time I interact with Jeannie, Mona, or Peony, their response has been immediate, positive, can-do, and highly productive. I am constantly impressed with the quality of their work and even more impressed with their supportive interactions with staff and passion for the work of the CRL. They are very deserving of the inaugural Driving Force Award.

Mike Hock

It is hard for me to think of Jeannie, Mona, and Peony separately because I associate them with so much that ICG does for professional learning. What impresses me the most about them is their commitment to the CRL and in particular the conferences and other events they oversee. They care a lot about the CRL and the events they organize, and their caring makes a difference.

Jim Knight

When I arrived in my job at CRL, when Janet Roth retired, I had Mona to guide me and partner with me and an incredible guide and partner she was! In our 12 years together, we supported the network and created new ways of moving the ball forward, and when we brought Peony on board, we had an unstoppable team. We missed Julie Tollefson and David Gnojek, but with Mona and Peony at the helm, we managed to revamp the SIM websites, Stratenotes went completely online, conferences were offered virtually, materials and flyers were created, and Micro-credentials became a reality. More determined, resourceful women could not/cannot be found anywhere. Mona took courses on her own time to learn programming. Peony came equipped with a ton of technology knowledge and learned SIM to do her best work; between them, they were the perfect leadership and support for our community. There may have been times to panic, but panic was not in their wheelhouse. They have always comported themselves with extraordinary kindness, caring, dignity, and knowledge and concern for the teachers and students that they teach. They believe in the work of the researchers and the Network and have always given their all to support them. Neither I nor the Network could have completed the work that we did without these incredible, irreplaceable women.

Patty Graner

Mona, Peony, and Jeannie have ALWAYS been so supportive. There are so many times when they have gone above and beyond to help. Jeannie's encouragement during comps, Peony's responsiveness to requests, and Mona's behind the scenes organization are just a few reasons why they stand out as people who have tirelessly served the CRL, and subsequently, the field of education.

Frances Ihle

Mona Tipton, Peony Allen, and Jeannie Heil absolutely rock! There are no others more deserving to win the first round of the Driving Force Award than these gals! Yeah!!

When I think of them, the first thing that comes to mind is "smiles" for so many reasons. Every time I see them, they greet me with a smile that lights me up, which in turn, causes me to smile and in turn, relax. The context of those smiles is really important in that the vast majority of my interactions with them has been in the context of personally very stressful situations before and during SIM conferences (e.g., worrying about an important presentation I'm about to make, where my handouts and materials are, where I need to be and when). One might think that they treat me 'special' but the reality is, that's how they treat EVERYONE during situations that are quite stressful to Mona, Peony and Jeannie (e.g., making conference arrangements, solving problems, helping silly people like me) while at the same time, smoothly running these conferences.

Having organized and run a few large conferences myself, I know how complex and demanding it is to anticipate, plan, organize, and implement them. It's hard!! During these conferences, one is in a constant monitoring and problem-solving mode, and yet, they make me feel like I'm (and everyone else is) the most important person in the building. In short, they enable me to do what I'm good at because they are so very good at doing what they are so good at.

The Driving Force Award is a very important recognition of the competence, commitment, blood, sweat, and tears that they have provided over the years. Literally hundreds of thousands of children have been affected by their commitment to the SIM mission. The bottom line is that SIM would never have had its significant impact without these no-longer 'unsung' heroes. Well done, Mona, Peony, and Jeannie.

Ed Ellis

No one has put more blood, sweat, and tears into making sure the KUCRL succeeds more than Mona and Peony. I'm in awe of the dedication you have to the network and KUCRL and the Center's success is a direct result of your efforts. You have been amazing colleagues and even better friends. Thank you for all that you do! SB's for life!

Nhan Nguyen

When outsiders evaluate the strength of the CRL, they predictably look at things that are easy to measure: the number of grants, the amount of external funding, etc. However, such measures only tell part of the story. The true essence and strength of the CRL is found in something we often refer to as the "CRL culture." That is, the way everyone embodies its core values, interacts with and treats others, the degree of emotional commitment and work ethic. In short, focusing on the team over individuals. Jeannie, Peony, and Mona have not only helped define the positive culture of the CRL but they conduct their lives in a way that keeps it vibrant and healthy. In countless and often quiet ways, they are wonderful role models for all who cross their paths. They are persons of impeccable integrity with very tender, loving hearts! How grateful I am for the remarkable influence they have had on me personally as well as on the CRL as a whole.

Don Deshler

Peony Allen

Research Project Specialist, SIM Department, KUCRL



The Origins of our Good Fortune

In 2008, Peony joined the Center as a program assistant and later became a research project specialist. Peony is an integral member of the SIM Department and the broader CRL staff. She is our front face for new educators interested in SIM and responds to SIM network requests with rapid speed. To name a few areas of focus, Peony is responsible for maintaining the SIM micro-credentialing system, our public SIM website, and our social media accounts. Over the years, Peony has worked on many projects and events with CRL researchers. Most recently, she is a team member for the OSEP-funded Project WRITE-APLM, the SIM project in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and the SIM project in Montana.

Peony approaches her work as an athlete would – she is team-oriented, ready to act, flexible, and focused on continual improvement for our systems and her own work. I deeply appreciate Peony's reliable mindset towards finding solutions.

Jocelyn Washburn

Peony is reliable, resourceful, and thorough. I have tremendous trust and respect for her. We are so lucky to have her on our team!

Amber Rowland

'What's Next?' A phrase some might have heard and maybe even use and yet, it is a phrase that captures Peony. A person who is constantly helping the team to achieve more; and, in the process, ensures that the effort and work put forward to a task is professional, effective, complete, and yes, efficient. I have been fortunate to know Peony for a number of years. Up until this past year, the interaction has been professional. Here, I have witnessed a team player who is constantly looked to for structure, organization, attention to detail, and one who can be counted on to get the job done, get it done efficiently, and ensure that the TEAM is successful in their effort. Over the past two years, I have come to understand that Peony also works her magic in the community as a business owner, spouse, mom and more. The CRL is truly blessed to have her as a key member of our team.

Sean Smith

I know that if ever something needs to be done thoroughly, expertly, and with a great attention to detail, Peony is the person to do it. I have been lucky enough to partner with Peony on project work, small limited-scope tasks, and large grant proposals. She is someone

who is great to work with in all of it. Even if she hasn't done something before, Peony will give it her best shot, and her best shot never disappoints. She isn't afraid to ask tough questions of our team, always in an effort to ensure the best possible outcome for the work we are doing. From the smallest to the largest tasks, Peony is willing to do any of it, and always with a smile. She is a wonderful teammate, and I'm grateful that I get to work with her regularly.

Suzy Myers

Peony shows up! She is always the one to say to me, "How can I help?" Peony listens and is the one who will help you understand how long something might take to get things done. She is timely and makes sure we are able to deliver to our teachers and students. Bottomline, I trust Peony! She allows for a little give and take when needed but uses kind and gentle ways to ensure things are completed on time.

Irma Brasseur-Hock

Peony deserves the Driving Force Award for her tireless work for the CRL. Whenever I had a question or needed help finding something on SIMville, Peony would help me quickly and efficiently. I would be so stressed trying to juggle too many things in my work life and Peony would be so kind and patient with me. For these reasons, Peony justly deserves to be recognized for her impact on the CRL.

Susanne James

I am forever grateful to Peony for her constant contributions at the CRL. With warmth in her smile, a spring in her step, and thoughtfulness for all involved, she has been a driving force behind the good work happening at the CRL. Each time I returned to the CRL to visit, I would find Peony engaged in an endless stream of tasks, cheery in her interactions with others, and a dizzying whirl of motion getting things done. Somehow, she always made time to say hello, making me feel like I belonged. As doc students come and go, that is not a small thing—to connect to people and help them belong. Thank you so much, Peony!

Michael Faggella-Luby

When I have a problem, I look forward to walking down the 7th floor south hallway and seeing Peony's welcoming smile through the office window even before I open the door. Then I know that any help I need is always waiting right inside that door.

Jan Bulgren

During my time at the CRL Peony was always there to ask how things were going. Once, I mentioned to her that I was having trouble finding daycare for my baby and I really needed something fast. Peony helped me find daycare for my baby when I REALLY needed it during data collection for my dissertation. Peony recommended her daycare provider, and it was a life saver to me and really a major reason why I was able to graduate on time!

Belinda Mitchell

Peony has always been so cheerful and helpful to me. She has been very understanding and patient with me when I have not known how to do something with my computer. I can't count the number of times that I have been panicked because I was about to give a speech or submit a grant proposal, and Peony came to my assistance at the perfect moment to fix my computer issue. No matter what she was doing, she set it aside and helped me right away. Always kind and matter of fact, Peony's knowledge and skills have been superior to anyone else around me. She's been my lifesaver!

Jean Schumaker

Jeannie Heil

Office Manager, KUCRL



The Origins of our Good Fortune

Jeannie joined the CRL in 2002 and has played a critical leadership role in ensuring that our office runs smoothly and efficiently, allowing other staff and our researchers to focus on their own responsibilities without worrying about administrative or operational issues. Jeannie's responsibilities are seemingly endless. She arranges our meetings, orders office supplies, tracks expenses, communicates with educators interested in our work, ensures that we are compliant all relevant regulations, works to get people to places they are supposed to be on time! Additionally, she is the center's liaison with other academic departments, research centers, and the university's central administration. Most importantly, Jeannie's work ethic, kindness, and commitment to the CRL's mission is central to who she is as a person and as a professional.

I appreciate how Jeannie knows the operations inside and out of the CRL, KUCR (the university research support center), and the Lifespan Institute. She juggles numerous details to keep our Center and its researchers and staff moving forward.

Jocelyn Washburn

Jeannie has your back! I can't tell you how many times I needed to rely on Jeannie to ensure all paperwork for folks who support our CRL/SIM efforts are done properly. She is understanding. I would say that Jeannie is the 'glue'. She keeps all things Center/SIM related together and helps us to have a smooth working organization. Jeannie cares!

Irma Brasseur-Hock

Jeannie was my buddy. She was everyone's buddy! Whether she met you at the entrance of our Dole building offices or passed you as she ran down the halls to address some calamity, Jeannie greeted you with individually tailored words that showed that you were known; that told you that she had your back. That is a great feeling to gift someone, and it takes a person with a super open heart to be able to give that. I know that I can talk to Jeannie today, or at any time in the future, and be able to strike up a great conversation without the slightest feeling that we had missed a beat!

Keith Lenz

Jeannie exemplifies a CRL employee who works diligently to support researchers and professional developers. Jeannie was one of the first people I met at the CRL when I was a doctoral student. We bonded over stories of my daughters and fulfilling the manual orders needed by professional developers. After I graduated, Jeannie continued to help me ordering materials and was always interested in my progress and, of course, my family. This personal approach and kind consideration optimized the impact on me as a teacher educator.

Susanne James

When I think of the CRL, I immediately think of Jeannie! She has been such a driving force in my growth and development not only as a researcher of the CRL but as a lowly doctoral student too. When I first came to the CRL, she was a warm and welcoming presence to me who always offered her support and provided me with some of the ins-and-outs to help me be successful. She was and continues to be someone who is kind and caring, who takes the time to ask about things like health and family, and who shares that same kind of information too. For example, although I haven't met her son, I feel like I went to college with him at the "other" university to the east of us because of our conversations regarding family and band, etc. I always enjoy that time. I have and will continue to treasure my friendship with Jeannie. She truly is a gem in the crown of the center.

Nanette Fritschmann

I always remember Jeannie in her office with monitors on her desk and the campanile out the window behind her. I am certain I don't know the scope of all she does for the Center and for me, but I am always grateful she is there when we need her.

Jan Bulgren

I believe the term Driving Force represents Jeannie Heil accurately. Though I did not interact with Jeannie on CRL business, I shared weekly hallway conversations with her for the better part of four years. Though our talks were not focused on particular topics, one theme rung clear, and that is family. I learned much about her family and how she is a central support in her family dynamic. As I reflect, it is easy to see that she plays the same role in the CRL family. Additionally, it is clear that the CRL would not have accomplished its mission without the remarkable support from Jeannie. I applaud Jeannie for her ongoing and meaningful contributions to the CRL.

Richard Carter

When Jeannie came to the CRL there were big shoes to fill in the front office—and we all needed someone who we could trust to help the trains run on time! In professional relationships trust is not always easy to earn but Jeannie made it look easy! For me, Jeannie was the model of trust. She showed up every day, learning a seemingly endless list of ways to navigate university, state, and through grants federal bureaucracy. More than once, I learned that when Don or Jean asked me to do something I had no idea where to begin, I could turn to her and we could figure it out together. She made me feel safe, never as stupid as I felt, and always with a little smile when we found the solution. I am forever grateful for her kindness, authenticity, and drive to get the job done. Thank you.

Michael Faggella-Luby

During my time at the CRL I knew if I needed any questions answered about any "paperwork," Jeannie knew the answer. Jeannie got things done quickly and correctly the first time around. She was always very organized and super-efficient in all the CRL work that needed to be done from large financial issues to even the smallest things like your order from Jason's Deli!

Belinda Mitchell

Jeannie is a very detail-oriented worker. She has been an efficient office manager for many, many years, so she is very knowledgeable about her work at the CRL.

Jean Schumaker

As I reflect on Jeannie Heil and her contributions to CRL, I remember a terrified baby doc student first walking into the office and being greeted by a warm, compassionate, and – I'm sure she wouldn't say this – but ALL KNOWING face: Jeannie Heil. Her organization, warmth, and skill helped make sure all the trains were running on time – and the new students who had a “deer in the headlights” look all got where they needed to be too. As I grew up in the program, I began to understand her critical role as the backbone of the CRL office, and why someone with her skillset – hard and soft skills – was so essential to the success of the center. Now, 12 years on, and I have my own (“you can't hold Jeannie's clipboard”) colleagues here at University of Virginia who have similar job descriptions, I have even deeper respect for the job Jeannie did. She did all that she did with precision and grace. A huge part of CRL's success is colleagues like Jeannie who receive approximately 0% of the credit, but deserve 100% of our admiration, thanks, and love.

Michael J. Kennedy

You've always been extremely supportive of me and everyone at KUCRL and you take on a lot to keep the center functioning at full capacity. Your efforts do not go unnoticed! I'm extremely appreciative of everything you've done for me and enjoyed working with you.

Nhan Nguyen

Jeannie Heil had her hands full with bookkeeping, but she didn't stop there. Working with graduate students also meant she had to help ‘raise us’—and support our understanding of how to manage ourselves if we wanted an academic life. I remember sitting in a chair across from her desk many times from 2013 to 2016, a recipient of sometimes stern, but very sound advice about the most effective way to save money and hassle for academic conferences: Plan early! Register early! Make your travel arrangements early. Book early to stay in the least expensive conference hotels. She made it sound easy. Over time, with much urging and patience from Jeannie, I learned to do this!

Mary Rice

Mona Tipton

Assistant Director of Professional Development, SIM Department, KUCRL



The Origins of our Good Fortune

Mona's time at the CRL began in 2004 when she was hired as the assistant to the director of professional development, Janet Roth. Since then, she has been more than a support to the director, but also a knowledgeable and perceptive guide for her SIM Department colleagues and director alike. Additionally, Mona is instrumental in supporting the SIM Network of professional developers. Not only does she represent the CRL with a high degree of professionalism, but she's said many times how rewarding her job is purely knowing her efforts support the hard work of dedicated professionals who care so deeply about children. Mona is our go-to person for organizing our SIM update conferences, keeping SIMville up-to-date with as many resources for the network as possible, and most recently supporting the development of Canvas Courses for the asynchronous portion of online SIM professional development opportunities. Mona has worked with everyone at the CRL in one way or another. Most recently, she is a team member for the OSEP-funded Project WRITE-APLM, the SIM project in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and the SIM project in Montana.

Mona is absolutely THE BEST!!! When I hired Mona to be my assistant at the CRL, I made one of the best decisions of my career. Mona brought innovative ideas, laughter, resourcefulness, a wonderful attitude, fabulous insight, and a willingness to learn new skills about anything we needed. In my last few years at the CRL, I looked forward to each day working with Mona. Mona was a GIFT, a gift to me, to the CRL, and to the SIM Network!!!!

Jan Roth

What I appreciate most about Mona is how she looks at a situation, a written product, a graphic design from several angles as well as stands back to view the big picture, and then given this critical lens, she asks excellent questions to determine the best path forward.

Jocelyn Washburn

When I think of Mona, I see her in front of the storm trooper figure behind her desk. What a perfect image to convey how Mona tackles and manages all the many "storms" we create for her at the CRL.

Jan Bulgren

Over the years, I have known Mona from afar. We would often enter JRP together and share some brief hellos and chat about the weather, the day, or something else. They were brief encounters and yet, I always walked away with a smile on my face. There is something about Mona that simply lights up a space and I found this was the case every morning. Fortunately, I have had the chance to work directly with Mona over the past two years. During this time, I have found that Mona is so much more than a smiling face and a person that offers warmth. Yes, she is that but also a committed professional to the needs of struggling learners and the professionals committed to their development. She offers structure, organization, attention to details, and a host of other critical skills necessary to ensure the success of any project. She is the backbone to the CRL and from her tireless effort, we are a better for what we are and what we seek to do as a Center.

Sean Smith

Any time I get the opportunity to be in a meeting with Mona, I know it will be a good one. More importantly, I know I will learn something. Mona has the best collection of random but oh-so-interesting and important information floating around in that brain of hers! I have learned so much from her about music, cats, food, and so much more. I also appreciate her clever and fun sense of humor. Aside from these things, Mona is someone I feel like I can always depend on for reliable information delivered in a kind and confident manner. She is a dependable source of information about SIM, the CRL, and KU in general, and she always seems willing to share her insights to help move our team forward.

Suzy Myers

Mona, for me, is one of those people who brings a smile to my face both when I think of her and of course when I see her virtually, and especially in person. She is highly skilled at what she does, very approachable, and always willing to help when needed and even when I didn't know that I needed her help! She is someone who I enjoy working beside and learning from. I always look forward to any Mona time I can get. Thank you for being YOU.

Nanette Fritschmann

Mona is simply the best! Mona brings a stability to the CRL and the SIM Network through her commitment and long-term willingness to support the mission of the Center and SIM. She adapts to different situations, roles, and responsibilities in pursuit of achieving the goals. She is always there to help ensure 'all things' are in place so those of us as professional developers can confidently go out and impact the lives of teachers and students.

Irma Brasseur-Hock

As a doctoral student and later as a professional developer, one of the scariest things you have to do is coordinate multiple activities across a great distance and with lots of moving parts. One snag in the process can seemingly throw the whole professional learning experience out of balance. The Driving Force award is perfect for Mona because she is a problem-solving force when challenges come up. Nothing could calm me like describing a seemingly impossible situation to Mona and then watching her pause and say, "We can figure that out." Her wisdom, generosity, and smile are models of staying cool when things heat up! Thank you, Mona! You are a Driving Force for the CRL, and model to me!

Michael Faggella-Luby

"Hey Mona, can you help me (insert annoying request)?" "Of course, Susanne, (insert funny comment)." This constant support with humor is why Mona deserves the Driving Force Award. Mona would always approach me at the CRL conferences with a smile and a kind word. In addition, Mona works so hard to make the conference experience so worthwhile and making sure it runs smoothly. I think she could rule the world AND make it a better place.

Susanne James

Mona has always been a "Can Do" person. She can create anything with the computer and make it look REALLY good! She has great organizational skills, too. Her talents have created the websites you've seen related to SIM and SIMville, plus the newsletters and conference programs. She is so careful and conscientious. All of her work is "top drawer," at the very highest quality!

Jean Schumaker

Mona is one of the funniest people I know. Her humor is unique, and her laugh and smile are infectious. During my time at the CRL I loved to pop in and visit Mona because I knew I would leave her office in a good mood. Mona is also very caring and not just in words but actions. Mona was always there for me when I needed her advice on life, in a real and practical way. Never just words of encouragement alone but always with actions too.

Belinda Mitchell