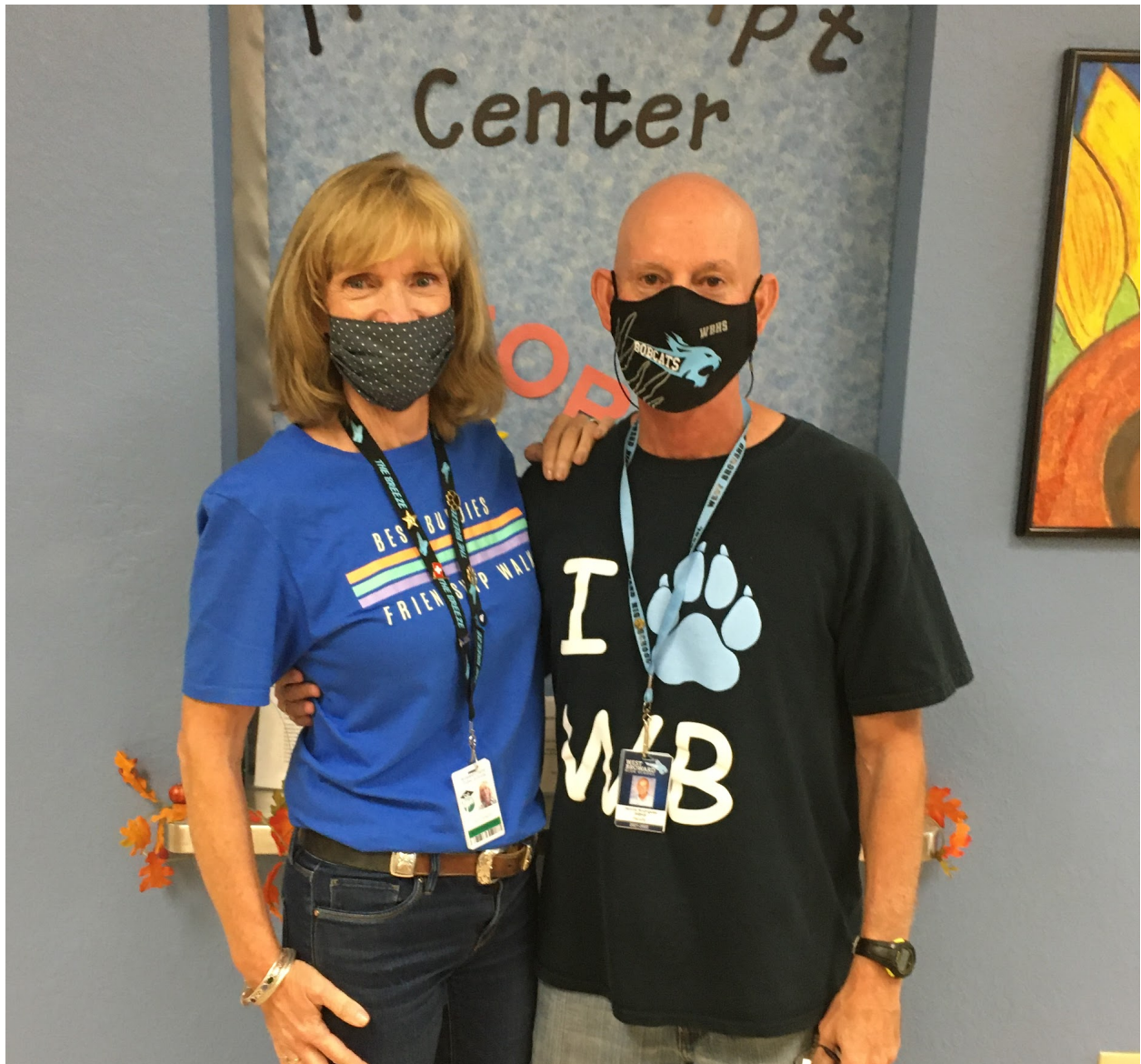


Rodrigues and Gallagher are celebrated as Bobcat Teacher and Employee of the Year

By Sarah Perez and Izabella Perez



HONORING OUR BOBCATS: AP Human Geography teacher Dennis Rodrigues and school counseling secretary Claire Gallagher pose for a picture. Both Rodrigues and Gallagher were awarded respectively as Teacher and Employee of the year. *Photo by Gary Dolhon*

The core of an effective and inspirational educator comes from how they affect their students. This is more than true for the winners of the 2021 Bobcat Teacher and Employee of the Year—AP Human geography teacher Dennis Rodrigues and school counseling secretary Claire Gallagher. Their enthusiastic spirit has had a lasting impact on both students and staff at West Broward High School.

Every year, the West Broward instructional and non-instructional staff gather to nominate and vote on Instructional and Non-Instructional Staff of the Year. Voting anonymously in the school mailroom, staff can accept or decline their nomination via the congratulations email sent out. The winners are announced at the end of the voting through the announcements and congratulated on their achievement.

“Rodrigues has dedicated himself to the students as well as helping his colleagues,” said Principal Brad Fatout. “Gallagher’s dedication and commitment shows, and I think the staff, as well as I, realize that they are amazing.”

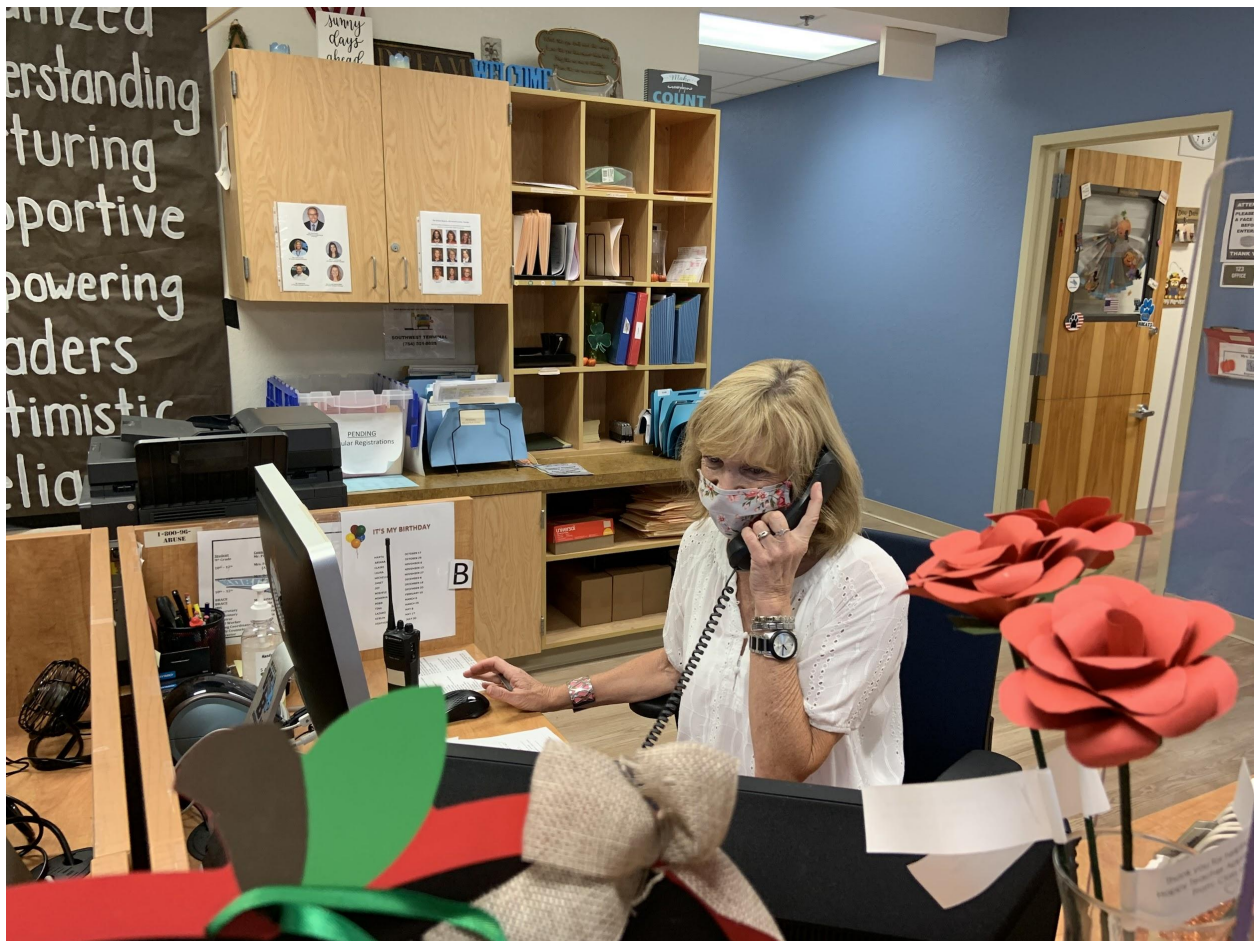
Gallagher, while having joined West Broward only three years ago, has already made an impact on both staff and students. As secretary, Gallagher is responsible for any student or parent that needs assistance, whether that be registration, transcripts, grade issues, etc. Her genuine kindness and high-spirited attitude have greeted anyone who walks into the guidance building, no matter the issue.

“From the day we hired her, she has been that person who has the best personality,” said school counseling director Mishele Difede, who nominated Gallagher for Employee of the Year.

“Whatever you need, it does not matter what it is, she is going to go above and beyond to help, and always does it with a smile and a friendly ‘Hello’.”

Before joining the Bobcat family, Gallagher had worked customer service jobs from hotels to hospitals. Her goal is to help others, and at West Broward, she is able to see students succeed both towards and after graduation.

“What I like best is when somebody comes in with something good to share,” Gallagher said. “When you get a high school graduate who comes back and says, ‘Miss, this is where I ended up in school and it is so good,’ that makes you feel like that is what it is about.”



GREET WITH A SMILE: School counseling secretary Claire Gallagher works hard to assist any parent or student who needs help. After only three years of attending West Broward, Gallagher has had the honor of winning Bobcat Employee of the Year.

Photo by Sarah Perez

As Gallagher works to keep West Broward’ students’ academic needs on track, Rodrigues has fostered and instilled an educational foundation to thousands of students for more than three

decades. Teacher of the Year Rodrigues began teaching in 1989 and has an unmistakable energy that affects everyone he comes into contact with. Teaching AP Human Geography since the opening of West Broward in 2007 and Personal Finance at the start of last year's school term, Rodrigues, or known simply as "Rod" to students and staff alike, has been a friendly and recognizable face in the hall to current and past students who remember his kindness in and out of the classroom.

"He is a unique teacher because he aims to foster an environment where his students feel like they can come to him with any issues," said senior Reese Burke. "He will try his best to make you feel better. I think that is really special."

Daniel Traeger, West Broward's first principal and old friend of Rodrigues, had reached out and asked to go over teaching and coaching ideas. Rodrigues accepted, unaware that he would be offered the job that he would stay at for the next 14 years.

"I said I would love to because he was my principal at my old school," Rodrigues said. "When we met he said 'I want you to come work for me' and I said okay."



PAY CLOSE ATTENTION: AP Human Geography and Personal Finance teacher Dennis Rodrigues instructs his Personal Finance class. After teaching at West Broward for 14 years, Rodrigues has had the honor of winning Teacher of the Year. *Photo courtesy of Valentina Padula.*

To celebrate this achievement, the West Broward Performance Ensemble percussion line played various cadences for the winners at the pavilion where they were each gifted with a potted plant.

“It was an honor, and it was a surprise when they came out with the band,” Gallagher said. “It was no surprise that I was very happy.”

Both Rodrigues and Gallagher will continue to present each day with a smile on their face and a determination to create as comforting of an environment as they can. Their nomination is no surprise, and neither is the impact they have on everyone at West Broward.

“My job is different every day. Anytime the door opens, you do not know who is going to walk through it,” Gallagher said. “It could be a parent with a problem, it could be a kid that is looking for transcripts or has an issue. It is always an opportunity to say hello.”