

Rochester community who represented Team USA at the 2026 Winter Olympics: Dylan Walczyk, Christopher Lillis, and Haley Winn. These exceptional athletes proudly represented our region on the world stage, competing with determination and excellence at the Winter Games last month. Their achievements reflect the strong tradition of athletic dedication and excellence that our community has long fostered.

Our local athletes demonstrated their remarkable abilities in various Olympic events. From the slopes to the rink, these competitors faced the very best athletes from around the world. Two of Rochester's own reached the top of the podium and brought home Olympic gold medals. Haley Winn competed in women's ice hockey and helped lead the team to a gold medal victory, defeating Canada in the championship game. Christopher Lillis competed in the freestyle skiing mixed team aerials competition, securing himself a second gold medal after winning the same event at the 2022 Winter Olympics.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the entire Rochester community, I congratulate these Olympians on their extraordinary athletic achievements at the 2026 Winter Olympics. We are incredibly proud of their remarkable accomplishments and contributions to inspiring the next generation of athletes in our region and across the country.

HONORING RHONDA SPENCER AS A DISTINGUISHED LEADER IN CENTRAL FLORIDA FOR WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

**HON. DARREN SOTO**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 30, 2026*

Mr. SOTO. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor Rhonda Spencer as a Distinguished Leader in Central Florida for Women's History Month. Rhonda Spencer has experienced an exceptional year. She has worked incredibly hard to improve not only her and her family's lives but also the lives of working people throughout the state of Florida.

Rhonda is an Orlando native, born April 18, 1977, to Mr. Ronald Spencer and Ms. Kathy Williams. She is the mother of three incredible children: Ahyll, Zariah, and Autavious, who she has raised with her husband, Alain, right in the heart of Central Florida. After living in Jacksonville for some time, she relocated back to Orlando, where she encountered significant challenges as a working mom, including homelessness, food insecurity, and the responsibility of raising children amidst these adversities.

Rhonda has proudly worked for Aramark at the Lockheed Martin facility on Sand Lake Road for fourteen and a half years as a food service worker, making sure that the folks who build the machinery that keeps our country safe are well fed and taken care of. Many of them are proud members of UAW Local 177. Rhonda and her coworkers decided that they too deserved the benefits that come with a strong labor union and a fair contract. In March of 2025, she and her coworkers achieved just that, winning incredible raises, quality and affordable healthcare, and a pension with their union, Unite Here! Local 362.

Rhonda and her family are now living in a beautiful home in Orlando and enjoying all those hard-won benefits. What really makes her special, though, is that even after winning all that, she and a team of almost all women returned to Jacksonville to help her fellow food service workers there achieve the same this past October.

Rhonda Spencer represents the epitome of the American Dream, and the strength that women show every day in our great country.

RECOGNIZING SALLY WELLMAN

**HON. GUS M. BILIRAKIS**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 30, 2026*

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an extraordinary advocate, educator, and volunteer, Sally Wellman, whose selfless dedication and tireless service to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community are truly deserving of recognition. After an impressive 40-year career at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, where she served as both a teacher and coordinator, Sally relocated to Florida with a clear mission: to remain an active part of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) community. In December 2021, she joined Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services of Florida (DHHSF), and her presence has strengthened the organization in countless ways. Sally tutors students ranging from elementary school through college, helping each reach their full potential. She supports DHHSF in every capacity—assisting with events, fundraisers, and innumerable behind-the-scenes tasks—always quietly ensuring that the work of the organization moves forward seamlessly. She serves as the backbone of many DHH-related activities in the community, yet rarely seeks recognition for her efforts.

Her impact is wide-ranging; she tutors children through the Deaf Literacy Center, volunteers at major Deaf community events, teaches American Sign Language (ASL) to interpreting students at St. Petersburg College, and provides evening tutoring to support student success. She also serves on the Wine Tasting and Silent Auction fundraising committee, contributing her time, energy, and expertise to secure sponsorships, assemble auction baskets, and coordinate logistics—efforts essential to the event's success.

Beyond her work with DHHSF, Sally is deeply involved in her broader community. She volunteers with the American Cancer Society, coordinating the Tampa area's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk for Survivors, and serves on her sorority's scholarship committee, which awards \$1.3 million annually. She participates in service projects such as the New Life Program for the Homeless and initiatives supporting Moffitt Cancer Center, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to helping others in every facet of her life. Sally humbly describes her favorite work as engaging personally with Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals through tutoring and social events, yet her quiet leadership extends far beyond what most ever see. Her dedication, generosity, and passion for improving the lives of others leave a lasting impact on countless individuals and on the community as a whole.

For her selfless service, quiet strength, and extraordinary commitment to empowering Deaf

and Hard of Hearing individuals, I am honored to recognize Sally Wellman as a 2026 Hero Among Us. I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Sally Wellman for her remarkable contributions, leadership, and unwavering dedication to our community.

HONORING KATHARINE "KAYE" PARTIN WHALEY AS A DISTINGUISHED LEADER IN CENTRAL FLORIDA FOR WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

**HON. DARREN SOTO**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 30, 2026*

Mr. SOTO. Mr. Speaker I rise to honor Katharine "Kaye" Partin Whaley as a Distinguished Leader in Central Florida for Women's History Month. For more than three decades, Katharine "Kaye" Partin Whaley has been a driving force in education, community service, and cultural preservation in Osceola County. A respected educator for 32 years, she has influenced thousands of students as a classroom teacher and, for the past nine years, as the Reading Coach at Harmony High School. Her dedication to academic excellence has earned her three Teacher of the Year awards and two Disney Teacherific Awards, reflecting her long-standing commitment to elevating student achievement and supporting educators across the district.

Kaye's leadership extends far beyond the classroom. A fifth-generation Osceola County rancher, she remains actively involved in her family's ranching operations. Her deep community roots are also evident in her long service to the Silver Spurs Club, where she has strengthened one of Osceola County's most treasured traditions. Over the years, she has contributed in numerous operational roles including concessions, ticketing, souvenirs, posters, stock support, and other behind-the-scenes efforts essential to producing rodeo events that bring families, visitors, and economic vitality to the region.

As Silver Spurs Parade Chairman for the past eight years, Kaye revitalized the historic parade, returning it to downtown St. Cloud and reinvigorating community participation. Her most ambitious accomplishment came in 2024, when she led the Silver Spurs Quadrille in its first-ever appearance in the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California. Through extensive planning and coordination, she organized the transport of 25 members and horses, earning national recognition for Osceola County and showcasing the cultural importance of the Silver Spurs Rodeo.

Now serving as the 2025–2026 Big Boss (President) of the Silver Spurs Club, Kaye brings unwavering dedication, vision, and a heart for service. Her priorities remain focused on strengthening family-friendly rodeo entertainment, expanding community impact, and supporting organizations that enrich Osceola County. Kaye Whaley continues to lead with passion, integrity, and a deep commitment to her community.

RECOGNIZING SAVE CRYSTAL  
RIVER**HON. GUS M. BILIRAKIS**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 30, 2026*

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Save Crystal River for its extraordinary leadership in restoring Kings Bay and protecting Florida's first-magnitude springs—natural treasures that are essential to our environment, economy, and water future.

Save Crystal River's work reflects what is possible when local commitment is paired with science-based solutions and determined advocacy. Kings Bay is one of Florida's most significant first magnitude spring systems, discharging millions of gallons of freshwater daily and sustaining manatees, fisheries, tourism, and downstream estuaries. When invasive Lyngbya algae, sedimentation, and decades of accumulated organic muck began choking spring vents and degrading habitat Save Crystal River stepped forward with vision and action. In 2015, the organization secured \$1.6 million in legislative funding for a pilot restoration project, launching a comprehensive, three-phase strategy in partnership with aquat-

ic restoration firm Sea & Shoreline. The first phase utilizes hydraulic vacuum dredging to remove legacy nutrients, muck, and invasive algae from the riverbed. To date, more than 700 million pounds of Lyngbya and detrital material have been removed, and more than 890 previously unidentified spring vents have been restored—reestablishing natural freshwater flow once thought unrecoverable. The second phase focuses on replanting native submerged aquatic vegetation, particularly eelgrass, to stabilize sediments, reduce nutrient loading, improve dissolved oxygen levels, store carbon, and provide critical habitat for manatees, fish, and invertebrates. More than 785,000 eelgrass units have been planted across over 120 acres of restored habitat, with survivability rates exceeding 90 percent in established areas. The third phase ensures long-term ecological resilience through continuous monitoring and adaptive management. Biologists assess more than 300 monitoring points, manage protective plant enclosures, and implement science-driven maintenance strategies to safeguard the restoration's success. Independent monitoring confirms measurable improvements in water clarity, biodiversity, and overall ecosystem function in restored areas compared to unrestored sites. The project faced a significant test on August 31, 2023,

when Hurricane Idalia brought a nine-foot storm surge into Kings Bay, initially resulting in substantial eelgrass loss. Yet through resilient, nature-based restoration design and ongoing stewardship, eelgrass recovery reached nearly 67 percent within one year and continues to improve—demonstrating that strategic spring restoration can withstand even extreme weather events.

The benefits of this work extend far beyond Citrus County. Protecting a first magnitude spring strengthens downstream estuaries, sustains fisheries, enhances tourism and recreational economies, stabilizes property values, and advances Florida's statewide water quality and resource protection goals. Kings Bay's recovery reflects a strong return on public investment and provides a replicable model for spring systems throughout Florida. Through sustained dedication, measurable results, and collaborative leadership, Save Crystal River has transformed environmental decline into a powerful success story of resilience and stewardship.

For its profound and lasting impact on Citrus County and its broader contribution to safeguarding Florida's natural heritage, I am proud to recognize Save Crystal River as a 2026 Hero Among Us for Florida's 12th Congressional District.