January 7, 2008

Dear SEAHO Award Selection Committee:

I am pleased to offer this letter of nomination for Erin Sandonato for the Humanitarian award. Erin is known for her deep caring for students and her passion for Residence Life. She is committed to helping her students no matter what their need and providing a quality experience for every resident. Erin’s resolve was truly tested over the past year and she rose to the occasion.

Erin has tackled a variety of issues ranging from floods that engulfed several rooms over winter break, to handling a major medical emergency and multiple bomb threats and consoling students during a time of grief from the loss of a beloved fellow resident and friend. Erin sacrificed her time and energy in each situation to ensure the safety of students, as well as, providing comfort to those impacted, whether they be a colleague, resident or parent. She has done all of this with no complaint and genuine concern for all involved.

It is difficult to prepare anyone for handling student crisis; even if you have been through one yourself. Erin intuitively navigates through these difficult times with grace and respect for all involved. In the case of the student death; Erin spent time in the hospital working with the student’s parents to assist them in their time of grief, as well as, communicating their wishes to the multitudes of students who were friends with their daughter. Erin arranged for grief counseling groups, a candle light vigil and a fundraising drive to assist with the medical bills. All these tasks she took on without hesitation as she saw a need.

When the flood occurred in her hall last winter break; Erin quickly gathered co-workers and took action to salvage the belongings of the students and a fellow staff member whose apartments were affected. She prepared storage areas where the belongings could be secured and found new rooms for the students to occupy. She also called all of them to make sure that they knew of the disaster and worked tirelessly with maintenance, custodial, insurance and contractor crews until all the repair work was complete.

Recently Erin’s hall has been the target of several bomb threats. Even the most patient person can become weary when spending multiple late nights and early mornings shivering in the cold while trying to appease residents whining about the inconvenience and fielding questions from police. Erin worked with university police and the campus safety office to improve bomb threat protocol and secured a location for residents to stay during future threats. She also fielded complaints from concerned and angry parents. Despite being tired and frustrated herself, Erin maintained her composure and continued to provide the best service she could to her residents.

I have been fortunate to have Erin on staff because she has been able to handle any situation that arises. I can count on her effective problem solving, compassion and work ethic. Erin is an excellent resource for her co-workers and is willing to help others in any way possible. I feel Erin Sandonato exemplifies the spirit of the Humanitarian award and I urge you to give full consideration for her nomination.

Sincerely,

Teddi Walker

Assistant Director of Residence Life

Valdosta State University