

2024 Rising Star Award Nomination

Nominee's Information

Nominee's Name:	Michelle Ditka
Nominee's Title:	Deputy Assessor
Nominee's Jurisdiction:	Staley Township
Years in Property Assessment:	4
Nominated By:	George McCaskey (Staley Township Assessor)

Nomination Questions:

How long has this individual been in the field and/or on staff with this office?

Michelle joined us in 2020 as a field worker and became a deputy assessor in 2022.

What positive impact have they already made that place them "head and shoulders" above others of similar experience and tenure?

As a field worker, Michelle immediately recognized our need for better community outreach based on the property owners she encountered when she was in the field. After talking over concerns and questions homeowners had about her presence as a field worker and how their assessments were determined, Chief Deputy Harold Grange and I started planning a series of community meetings. We asked Michelle to be at them and participate to explain the process of how we collect data in the field. If it had not been for Michelle communicating the concerns and confusions of our local property owners, Harold and I would have likely never organized the community meetings during our quad year.

Outside of core qualifying courses and electives to obtain a CIAO, how has this individual demonstrated a commitment to professional development?

Michelle earned her CIAO in 2021. She attended the State Conference for the first time in 2024 and took three classes (two IPAI and one IDOR) over 2022 and 2023. She has attended webinars with IL IAAO and the IPAI. Michelle is not afraid to ask questions and often comes into my office asking "why" and "how" questions of our processes and assessments in order to better understand. She has already asked to attend the 2025 State Conference and take an additional two-day course in 2025. She is hungry for knowledge and does so to be better at her job.

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How has this individual displayed leadership qualities that have positively impacted their work environment, or the office's interactions with the public and/or other assessment-related offices and organizations?

Last year after having been a deputy assessor for a few months, Michelle recognized many people called, emailed, or came into our office with the same questions. "Why is my assessment this much? How do I appeal this? Where do I find information about exemptions?" and the like. To help address this and make sure we were giving people correct, consistent information, Michelle compiled a document of responses to common questions. She took the lead creating it and consulted with others in the office to ensure she had the right answers. This common questions document is now used by everyone in the office when replying to emails or answering questions on the phone. It sounds like a simple idea, but it was Michelle who said, "We should put this down on paper so we all can access it." It is a little thing that has made a big difference for our staff as well as the taxpayers in our jurisdiction.



STALEY TOWNSHIP ASSESSORS OFFICE

GEORGE MCCASKEY, ASSESSOR

524 E Main Street, Bearsdale, Illinois 62526

November 10, 2024

Board of Directors
Illinois Property Assessment Institute
207 W Jefferson St, STE 201
Bloomington, IL 61701

RE: Rising Star Award

Dear IPAI Board,

It is my pleasure to write a supporting letter for Michelle Ditka to be given the 2025 Rising Star Award.

I am the Chief Deputy Assessor in Staley Township and have had the chance to work closely with Michelle on a number of projects. I helped hire her with George. With her first interview, I was impressed with her responses to questions. Once she started, I personally trained her in doing field work. For someone new in the field, she was eager to learn. She didn't mind doing field work and embraced every chance to do it.

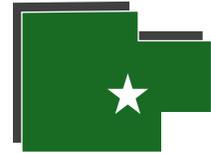
Michelle loves to ask questions! She is very curious about all things assessment and often wants to know the 'why' of everything from exemptions to how you apply the income approach. Her soft leadership helped us develop a series of community meetings to educate the public about assessments during our most recent quad year.

I've been here for 22 years, six of those as chief deputy and I can tell you Michelle is one of those special employees and someone worthy of this Rising Star Award.

Thank you,

Harold Grange, CIAO-I
Chief Deputy Assessor
Staley Township

FORSYTH COUNTY, ILLINOIS
SUPERVISOR OF ASSESSMENTS OFFICE
William Swerski, CIAO



1414 North Oak Street, Room 405, Bearsdale, IL 62526

November 21, 2024

Award Committee
Illinois Property Assessment Institute
207 W Jefferson St, STE 201
Bloomington, IL 61701

RE: Dikta Star Award Nomination

Dear IPAI Board,

I am writing to ask your support of Michelle Ditka for the Rising Star Award.

About eighteen months ago, Staley Township Assessor George McCaskey called me and said he and his chief deputy were planning to hold a series of public meetings around the city to help educate the public on assessments. I told him it was a great idea, especially during a quad year when many values would be adjusted. George explained to me that the idea came from one of his deputies named Michelle Ditka. I immediately thought, 'a new deputy came up with this?' That's pretty good for someone early in their career!

I attended the meetings to speak about the county's side of things. McCaskey had Michelle there as well. She got up at every meeting and talked about the process for field work, how she looked at each home, how she measured, kinds of things she looked for, etc. I was very impressed to see someone so young in their career in front of a crowd speaking about such things with the public and then answering their questions.

McCaskey has gone on to tell me many other ways Michelle is making a difference in their office. To me, she seems very deserving of this award, and I encourage the committee to recognize her in this way. We need more people like Michelle in our industry!

Sincerely,

Bill Swerski, CIAO
Supervisor of Assessments

Pride of the prairie, serving the people of Forsyth County.



**STALEY TOWNSHIP
OFFICE OF THE SUPERVISOR**

TODD P. O'CONNOR

524 E Main Street, Bearsdale, Illinois 62526

November 14, 2024

Illinois Property Assessment Institute
Board of Directors
207 W Jefferson St, STE 201
Bloomington, IL 61701

RE: Rising Star Award

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to support the nomination of Michelle Ditka for the 2025 Rising Star Award from the IPAI.

Assessor McCaskey has spoken very highly of Michelle since the day she was hired. He has often described her as sharp, dedicated, and great with the public. A few months back, I had someone wander into my office looking for the assessor. I walked him over to the front counter in the Assessor's office and Michelle was there and greeted him nicely.

I stayed for a few minutes and watched their interaction. The man was irritated with his assessment notice and was ready to complain about it. Michelle kept her calm, spoke nicely to him, and helped explain the assessment process. I know she has only been on staff for a few years, but she had a strong understanding of the facts and took her time to explain everything to him. I left them to it and went back to work. The man popped into my office about an hour later to say thank you for getting him where he needed to go. He was very complimentary of Michelle and the time she took with him.

Township government is the level of government closest and most accountable to the people. For that reason, we need people like Michelle working in townships. She has been doing a great job for us and should be recognized for those efforts. Please say "yes" to Michelle Ditka for your Rising Star Award in 2025!

Respectfully,

Todd O'Connor
Staley Township Supervisor