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2025-26 Champion Spirit Awards

Derry Area HS Kathy Perry Named Coach of the Year, Freedom HS Team Spirit Award

MECHANICSBURG, PA – The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association, Inc. (PIAA) is pleased to announce Derry Area High School Head Coach, Kathy Perry as this year's recipient of the 2026 Champion Coach of the Year Award and Freedom High School's Cheerleading team honored with the 2026 Champion Team Spirit Award.

Coach Kathy Perry is a varsity cheerleading coach that demonstrates dedication to her school, community, and student-athletes. She was nominated by Derry Area's Superintendent Greg Ferencak.

Coach Perry is a community-centered leader, using the high school cheer program as a platform for service, connection, and pride. Under her guidance, the team has organized community fundraisers and partnered with local businesses to strengthen relationships. She leads by example through volunteer efforts at the food pantry, in the Veterans Day program, and by mentoring younger cheerleaders. Whether representing the school in local parades or rallying students to support community initiatives, she models integrity, teamwork, and service.



Kathy Perry, Derry Area HS Cheerleading Coach receiving award from Team Champion representative Taryn Souder.



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Coach Perry shares the district's commitment to developing well-rounded, community-minded students by integrating academic check-ins, character lessons, and service opportunities into the program.

She fosters a culture where every cheerleader feels valued, supported, and accountable to one another. Her leadership style—rooted in respect, clear communication, and genuine care—creates a positive team environment where collaboration comes naturally and athletes are motivated to give their best.

She demonstrates exceptional courtesy, flexibility, and responsiveness, especially under pressure, whether adjusting practice plans on short notice, guiding the squad through competitive challenges, or calmly navigating unexpected obstacles with professionalism and composure.



Freedom High School Cheerleading Squad was awarded the 2026 Champion Team Spirit Award.

Freedom High School's Varsity Squad demonstrates excellence beyond the competition floor. The Patriots were nominated by their Coach Noelle Davis for the 2026 Champion Team Spirit Award.

The Freedom Cheer Team raises spirits on and off the sidelines. Starting with the week-long "Mini Pates Camp" in which younger cheerleaders from the community learn from and cheer alongside the squad. Many of our cheerleaders are involved in junior coaching, teaching the little one's cheers and skills, while leading team-bonding activities and games. The youth squads are invited to cheer alongside Freedom during a football game. This past fall, a record setting 110 Mini Pates were in attendance.

Freedom cheerleaders also act as volunteers, coaches, and supporters at several Special Olympic events yearly. This past June, Freedom Cheer attended the Passing of the Flame of Hope ceremonial run and pep rally as our Special Olympians headed off to Penn State for the summer games!

At the annual Thanksgiving Turkey Bowl supporting the Pediatric Cancer Foundation of Lehigh Valley the squad cheers on the participants in the powder-puff and staff football games and performs at half time alongside the Liberty cheerleaders from Bethlehem



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Area School District. Both squads come together for a good cause to encourage attendance and work together to raise money for this amazing cause.

In addition, Freedom Cheer volunteers arrive at school early and plant remembrance flags at the 9/11 Never Forget Project annually and assists in making Christmas cards given to residents at a local nursing home.

At the final fall pep rally every year, Freedom puts on a “Co-Ed Cheer” performance, inviting senior boys to participate. They have several practices then perform a 2-minute competition routine. This year they set another attendance record with 40 senior boys participating! They had a great time and embraced the experience, even wearing cheer uniforms. The students and faculty loved it so much, they asked for an encore performance. The senior boys who participated expressed gratitude for the opportunity, and a newfound appreciation for the hard work this cheer team puts in.

The Champion Spirit Awards began in 2013-14 and since, has honored 13 coaches and 12 teams.

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Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association

Beginning in Pittsburgh, on December 29, 1913, PIAA was given the privilege of serving its member schools and registered officials by establishing policies and adopting contest rules that emphasize the educational values of interscholastic athletics, promote safe and sportsmanlike competition, and provide uniform standards for all interscholastic levels of competition.