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Wisconsin Policy Forum announces first statewide “Salute to Local Government” award winners

MILWAUKEE AND MADISON –The Wisconsin Policy Forum, a nonpartisan independent public policy research organization, has announced its 2018 *Salute to Local Government* award winners.

“We are pleased to again recognize outstanding innovation in local governments and school districts throughout Wisconsin,” says Forum President Rob Henken. “The Salute reflects our strong belief that qualities like innovation and collaboration are alive and well in municipal buildings, courthouses, and school administration offices throughout Wisconsin, and that governmental bodies and individuals exhibiting those qualities should be recognized and applauded.”

This year’s *Salute* marks the first time the awards are being presented to local governments throughout Wisconsin, which reflects the Wisconsin Policy Forum’s status as a statewide organization. The Wisconsin Policy Forum was created in January with the merger of the Madison-based Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance and the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum.

The Salute includes awards categories that recognize governments and school districts for innovative problem-solving, effective use of technology, partnership, and cooperation, as well as individuals in the public sector for excellence and lifetime achievement.

The awards will be presented at the 26th annual *Salute to Local Government* breakfast on **Tuesday, June 19, 7:30 – 9:00 a.m. at the Italian Community Center in Downtown Milwaukee.** The awards program will feature a keynote address by Mitch Teich, host of WUWM's *Lake Effect*.

The 2018 recipients are:

“Innovative Approach to Problem Solving”

City of Milwaukee Municipal Court

Milwaukee's municipal court has long recognized that warrants and drivers' license suspensions are often barriers to employment, housing, and loans, with up to 70% of people receiving municipal citations failing to appear for their initial hearing. In an effort to engage defendants and help them resolve outstanding warrants, the court in 2016 began holding “Warrant Withdrawal Wednesdays” informing defendants that – as always – they would not be arrested if they came to court and judges would remove the barriers of warrants and suspensions while providing time to pay the judgment or connect with community service options. Over three days, 2,400 people with more than 15,000 cases were seen, nearly half of whom had never appeared before the court on their cases. In 2017, the court moved the program into the community by partnering with the Greater New Birth Church; for the first session, 250 people registered in advance, 79% of whom had never been seen in court on their cases. After their hearings, participants were able to meet with representatives from the state Division of Motor Vehicles, community resource agencies, and employers. Another event was held at GNBC last year, with similar success, and two more events are planned for this year.

“Innovative Use of Data or Technology”

City of Muskego

To improve geographic information systems, the City of Muskego's Department of Public Works (DPW) sought to purchase a drone and associated software but found the costs prohibitive. The DPW partnered then shared with the Muskego Police Department to purchase and share use of the drone for both public works and public safety purposes. Since 2017, DPW has used the drone for mapping, tracking of utilities, producing economic development videos, and determining and documenting land violations in a safe manner. Meanwhile, police have used the drone to survey Little Muskego Lake to search for missing juveniles who had been canoeing, investigate an active arson fire, and to promote better community relations.

“Intergovernmental Cooperation”

City of Waukesha and City of Milwaukee

After nearly a decade of discussions, the City of Milwaukee and the City of Waukesha reached an agreement for Waukesha to obtain Lake Michigan water from Milwaukee. The

agreement provides Waukesha, whose current water supply is unsustainable and contains natural contaminants, access to water for the next 40 years at a significantly lower cost than similar arrangements with other neighboring communities. In order to reach the agreement, Waukesha became the first community outside the Great Lakes Basin to be allowed to access Lake Michigan water under the Great Lakes Compact. Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett calls the agreement “the most significant intergovernmental cooperation agreement in southeastern Wisconsin,” while Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly says he hopes it will lead to “additional collaborations for the common good of our residents and businesses.”

“Public-Private Cooperation”

Sheboygan Falls School District and Bemis Manufacturing

Under an arrangement with Bemis Manufacturing, the Sheboygan Falls high school is able to offer state-of-the-art manufacturing technology, including a commercial-use injection molding machine, as part of its Innovation Design Center. The machine allows students to learn how to manufacture plastic parts and also exposes them to other skills, such as cnc machining and precision measurement. The district has been working with Bemis and other area businesses to teach students both technical skills and “soft skills,” such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, and to develop private-sector mentoring programs.

“Jean B. Tyler Leader of the Future Award”

Jeremiah Johnson

Director of Operations and Human Resources, Muskego-Norway School District

In his 16 years with the Muskego-Norway School District, Jeremiah Johnson has risen from a part-time, on-call substitute custodian attending classes at Milwaukee Area Technical College to the district’s Director of Operations and Human Resources. During his tenure, Jeremiah has created a workplace safety initiative that reduced injuries by half and lowered the district’s insurance premium costs by \$100,000, enacted a sustainability program that resulted in \$2 million in energy savings since 2013, led over \$50M in construction projects, and developed a mobile phone application to more effectively and efficiently complete building assessments. As Superintendent Kelly Thompson put it, not only has Jeremiah sought to systematically improve district operations and practices, “he demonstrates amazing talent in his ability to listen to other perspectives and viewpoints, build consensus, problem solve, communicate, and connect with others.”

“James R. Ryan Lifetime Achievement Award”

Mark Nicolini (co-winner)

Retired Budget Director, City of Milwaukee

Mark Nicolini retired in September 2017 after a nearly 35-year career in public service. He began in 1983 as a state budget analyst in the Department of Public Instruction and the State Budget Office. In 1989, Mark moved to Milwaukee, where he worked in local government for nearly 30 years. He began his municipal services career as the City Council’s fiscal research supervisor, then from 1998 to 2004, held a budget and strategic planning position with the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. In 2004, he became the city’s budget and management director, the post he held until his retirement. In that role, he oversaw development and implementation of the annual budget, management analysis of

city operations, and development and analysis of fiscal policy and legislative proposals. A graduate of the UW-Madison's La Follette School of Public Affairs, Mark also coordinated a number of projects where La Follette students worked with the city to solve real-life policy and management problems. Upon Mark's retirement, Ald. Michael Murphy praised Mark as "a brilliant and thoughtful fiscal analyst whose quiet demeanor and class act have helped to shape and focus the future of Milwaukee for the better."

"James R. Ryan Lifetime Achievement Award"

Pat Greco (co-winner)

Superintendent, Menomonee Falls School District

For the past seven years, Pat Greco has served as superintendent of the Menomonee Falls School District, where both she and the district's schools have consistently received top honors. The district won a Journal Sentinel Top Workplace award three years in a row; its high school has been named a silver-rank school by U.S. News & World Report; and 130 of its students have been named Advanced Placement Scholars. In addition to receiving our Lifetime Achievement Award, Pat was named the 2018 Wisconsin School Superintendent of the Year by her peers in the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators. Pat, who announced her plans to retire earlier this year, has worked in education for the past 36 years. She began her career as a special education teacher in the Kewaskum School District, then served as a principal at Ben Franklin Elementary in Menomonee Falls. Prior to returning to Menomonee Falls, she was superintendent in the West Bend School District for six years. In nominating her for the WASDA award, Menomonee Falls School Board President Faith VanderHorst said Pat has not only helped the district navigate financial and legislative challenges but "the most amazing aspect is the way she has 'brought everyone along on the journey,'" making it a combined effort where everyone has felt to be a contributor and important component to our overall success."

"Norman N. Gill Award"

Martha Brown

Deputy Commissioner, Department of City Development, City of Milwaukee

In her nearly 40 years with the City of Milwaukee, Martha Brown has served four mayors and seven Department of City Development Commissioners. As deputy commissioner, she oversees the department's day-to-day operations and assesses the long-term impact of policy changes and initiatives. She began her career with the city in 1979 as a management administrative assistant and then rose through the ranks to become the city's economic development marketing manager. In 1999, she was chosen by Mayor John Norquist to lead the newly created development center, and in 2004 was named deputy commissioner of DCD by Mayor Tom Barrett. She has played key roles in promoting supportive housing, advancing the Strong Neighborhoods Program, and coordinating the city's 10-year action agenda for economic development. In nominating her for the award, DCD Commissioner Rocky Marcoux praised Martha for achieving "consistently superior outcomes while processing a huge volume of work" that is respected by all parties in the community. As Mayor Barrett put it, "If there's a tough project that needs to be done, I count on Martha to lead and deliver excellence. She is a top-notch administrator and dedicated public servant who has left an indelible mark on municipal government and the City of Milwaukee."

The substantial number of outstanding nominations also prompted the Forum to award Honorable Mentions in the “Innovative Approach to Problem Solving” and “Innovative Use of Technology or Data” categories:

- Hortonville Area School District for their “E3” school-based mental health wellness program
- Wauwatosa School District for their digital music class

The *Salute* is sponsored by Baker Tilly; BMO Harris Bank; Ehlers & Associates, Inc.; Bader Philanthropies; Milwaukee PBS; Northwestern Mutual Foundation; Potawatomi Hotel & Casino; Quarles & Brady, LLP; Veolia Water; and We Energies.

The Wisconsin Policy Forum was created on January 1, 2018 by the merger of the Madison-based Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance and the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum. Throughout their lengthy histories, both organizations engaged in nonpartisan, independent research and civic education on fiscal and policy issues affecting state and local governments and school districts in Wisconsin. WPF is committed to those same activities and that same spirit of nonpartisanship.