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Forum announces Salute to Local Government award winners

MILWAUKEE AND MADISON –The Wisconsin Policy Forum is proud to announce its **2020 Salute to Local Government** award winners, including two that recognize responses to the COVID-19 crisis.

“We are pleased to honor a very deserving group of governments and public sector leaders for their innovation, collaboration, and excellence, especially during what has been an historically challenging year,” Forum President Rob Henken said.

The 28th Annual Salute celebrates the benefits that public sector ingenuity and excellence bring to taxpayers and communities throughout Wisconsin. Award categories recognize local 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.

Newly added this year were two award categories that **highlight the unprecedented pandemic-related challenges** facing local governments and school districts across the state.

“Given the extraordinary demands the COVID-19 outbreak continues to place on local governments and school districts, as well as the increased hours worked and risks taken by public sector workers every day, we felt the least we could do is honor two examples of outstanding effort that reflect the many public servants who are rising to the occasion,” Henken said.

Previously the Salute has been an in-person event held during the summer. Due to COVID-19, this event was reimagined and will be held in a virtual format on **Wednesday, November 18** at 12 p.m. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Award recipients are:

Innovative Approach to Problem-Solving

Public Safety Department

Village of Palmyra

What if you called 911 and nobody came? As in many communities, this was a very real concern for the citizens of Palmyra. The village’s solution was to create a Public Safety Department employing full-time public safety officers cross-trained in law enforcement, firefighting and EMS to supplement Fire Rescue paid on call responders. The department implemented strategies that enhanced

teamwork and improved employee retention, leading to greatly improved outcomes within budgetary limitations – and providing a framework that could be emulated by other rural communities.

Innovative Use of Data or Technology

Park Place Performs
City of Janesville

In January 2020, the City of Janesville relaunched its online performance dashboard, Park Place Performs! This tool was originally launched in January 2017 to enable public and city officials to track progress of the city's strategic goals. In the month following the site's relaunch, site page views totaled 2,277 – about a 1,200% increase from the same period in 2019. Park Place Performs increases accountability and transparency of the City of Janesville for the benefit of the community.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Barton School Apartments
Washington County

In 2012, Washington County's Brownfield Site Redevelopment Program, with the objective of transforming formerly contaminated and unused industrial sites into new and vibrant economic developments, includes a collaboration of five municipalities with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Economic Development Washington County. The Barton School Apartments project in West Bend is a recent beneficiary of this program. It consists of 22 historically-preserved apartments renovated from the former 1924 Barton Elementary School building, and 18 townhomes constructed on the former school playground.

Public-Private Cooperation

Milwaukee Employment/Renovation Initiative (MERI)
City of Milwaukee Department of City Development
Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (DFI)

In the wake of the unrest in Milwaukee's Sherman Park neighborhood in August, 2016, elected officials and citizens alike called for swift action to address problems such as poor housing and lack of jobs. A partnership between state and city officials and six private developers created the MERI. This initiative invested \$7.9 million in over 100 tax-foreclosed properties, well above the original goal of \$1 million. Further, 33,000 hours of work were performed by city residents, many of whom later received permanent employment.

Norman N. Gill Award

Dale Peters, City Manager
City of Eau Claire

It's a testament to the collaborative, results-oriented leadership style of Eau Claire City Manager Dale Peters that area business and community leaders breathed a collective sigh of relief this past spring when he postponed his May retirement until the end of the COVID-19 crisis. A city employee since 1989, he's developed a well-earned reputation for effective and innovative management.

Jean B. Tyler Leader of the Future Award

Abby Attoun, Director of Planning and Community Development
City of Middleton

Abby Attoun leads the Department of Planning & Community Development for the City of Middleton. Thirteen years ago she started with the City as a planner, and over that time her passion, diverse interests, and collaborative approach to work and community engagement has resulted in her fingerprints being on many transformative projects, and all well before her 40th birthday. Today, she continues to lead a variety of key city initiatives involving planning, community and economic development, affordable housing, public art and sustainability.

Excellence Under Pressure

TJ McCray, Director of Instructional and Library Media Services
Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD)

When schools shut down on short notice due to COVID-19, TJ McCray worked to transform Wisconsin's second largest school district – with over 27,000 students and 3,000 employees – into a virtual one. That challenge included purchasing and distributing 1,800 hotspots with six-month data plans so children without home internet had equal access to virtual learning opportunities. He also created professional development for teachers to help them adapt to this new way of teaching.

Effective Response to COVID-19

Public Health & City Clerk's Office
City of Madison

The City of Madison emerged as a model, a leader, and a success story during this difficult time, in close partnership with Dane County, State of Wisconsin, UW-Madison, the medical community, Wisconsin National Guard, and other stakeholders. The City developed extensive COVID-19 public health metrics, and held free and fair elections in the midst of this dangerous pandemic.

James R. Ryan Lifetime Achievement Award

Dianne Robertson, former Administrator/Clerk/Treasurer
Village of Thiensville

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment over Dianne's 45-year career was to make flooding a thing of the past in this historic community. Thiensville has erected a bridge named "Dianne's Bridge" in her honor and she has donated a bench in her late husband's memory to mark the area. In addition, Thiensville entered uncharted territory for most municipalities these days by becoming debt-free in 2007 and remained debt-free through her retirement.

Honorable Mention award recipients are:

Effective response to Covid-19

City of New Richmond
NR Strong

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Milwaukee County and its 19 municipalities
Milwaukee County Unified Emergency Operations Center

The 28TH Annual Salute to Local Government is sponsored by Baker Tilly, Bader Philanthropies, BMO Harris Bank, Ehlers, Herb Kohl Philanthropies, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Northwestern Mutual, Potawatomi Hotel & Casino, Quarles & Brady LLP, Veolia, and We Energies.

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