



PUBLIC POLICY FORUM

IMPARTIAL RESEARCH. INFORMED DEBATE.

For more information:

Rob Henken
President
Public Policy Forum
414-276-8240 (w) or 414-708-4392 (c)
rhenken@publicpolicyforum.org

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Public Policy Forum announces 24th annual “Salute to Local Government” award winners

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – *Wednesday, June 1, 2016* – The Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, a nonpartisan public policy research organization, has announced its 2016 *Salute to Local Government* award winners.

“During a year like this one that is marked by fierce local, state, and national electoral battles, it is particularly important to recognize the outstanding work performed by nonpartisan professionals in the halls of local government and in school administration buildings across southeast Wisconsin,” says Forum President Rob Henken. “The Salute reflects the Forum’s strong belief that ‘good government’ is a value shared by citizens of all political stripes, and that exceptional public sector performance should be trumpeted and celebrated.”

This year’s *Salute* includes awards categories that recognize governments and school districts for innovative problem-solving, partnership, and cooperation, as well as individuals in the public sector for excellence and lifetime achievement.

The awards will be presented at the Public Policy Forum's 24th annual *Salute to Local Government* breakfast on **Tuesday, June 21, 7:30 – 9:00 a.m. at the Italian Conference Center, 631 East Chicago Street, in Milwaukee's Historic Third Ward.**

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

The 2016 recipients are:

“Innovative Approach to Problem Solving”

City of Milwaukee

Between 2007 and 2015, the City acquired an average of 534 properties annually through tax foreclosure. Many were severely distressed and concentrated in very low-income neighborhoods already challenged by high levels of unemployment and disinvestment. As one element of a comprehensive set of strategies to address this problem, the City enlisted real estate developer Gorman & Company and the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority to join it in efforts to return City-owned foreclosed properties to productive use. The result was the Northside Housing Initiative, a comprehensive community development partnership that, since 2007, has resulted in the construction of 111 new homes on City-owned vacant lots; the renovation of 128 City-owned one-family, two-family and multi-family structures containing 212 units; and the training and employment of more than 300 chronically unemployed men and women who have gained construction trades experience by working on the project.

“Data-Driven Management or Decision-Making” & “Intergovernmental Cooperation”

Bridges Library System

The Waukesha County Federated Library System (WCFLS) was founded in 1981 as a single-county system to provide services to the 16 public libraries in Waukesha County. In 2015, Waukesha and Jefferson counties began a system restructuring project to create a new multi-county library system. Officially established on January 1, 2016, the new Bridges Library System is comprised of all 24 public libraries in Waukesha and Jefferson counties. Among its many successes, the new system successfully migrated all Jefferson County libraries into the automated library catalog maintained by the WCFLS. An increase of 510,000 library items in the shared CAFÉ catalog, which includes books, audiobooks, movies, and more, gives library patrons improved access to information and entertainment. The merger also has resulted in a 16% annual cost reduction to each member library, which was more than the initial goal of a 14% cost reduction.

“Public-Private Cooperation”

City of Franklin, Kayla's Krew

Kayla's Krew is a group of citizens who sought to build an all-inclusive playground in Franklin that would be accessible for all children and families of any age and ability. The effort was dedicated to the memory of Kayla Runte, a little girl with cerebral palsy who passed away at the age of eight. Collaborating with the City of Franklin and several additional public and private sector organizations – including the Franklin Public School District, Greendale Public School District, and Penfield Children's Center – Kayla's Krew organized a community-wide effort to build the playground. Kayla's Playground was built in nine days with the assistance of almost 2,000 citizen and business volunteers who worked closely with paid and volunteer Franklin Department of Public Works and Engineering Department employees. The 12,000 square foot all-accessible and all-inclusive playground – housed at the City-owned Franklin Woods Nature Center – was completed in September.

“Public-Private Cooperation”

City of Milwaukee and a variety of public and private sector partners

Concerned that too many of Milwaukee's city-owned parks were deteriorating and underutilized, then-Common Council President Michael Murphy spearheaded MKE Plays, an initiative to restore 12 of Milwaukee's worst playgrounds. The initiative involves neighborhood residents of all ages, community nonprofits and neighborhood associations, elected and appointed officials, university faculty and volunteers, and public and private funders. It has completed renovations on two playgrounds, with the remaining 10 already financed with public and private funds and slated for completion by 2018. The 12 playgrounds were selected in a data-driven manner based on analysis by Milwaukee's Department of Public Works. MKE Plays has successfully raised more than \$1 million in private funding from local foundations as well as the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. The City also has contributed more than \$700,000 to the project.

“Leader of the Future Award”

Sarah Zàrate

Staff Assistant to the Council President, City of Milwaukee

Sarah Zàrate served as staff director to the Milwaukee Common Council President from June 2014 to early 2016. In that role, she conducted important policy analysis, including a report on drug overdose deaths that prompted a joint initiative by the City and the Medical College of Wisconsin. She also designed and led the implementation of policy initiatives herself, including MKE Plays and the MKE Peace Project. MKE Plays (see above) involved a highly collaborative public-private partnership to renovate 12 of the City's most dilapidated playgrounds, while the MKE Peace Project engaged youth in Milwaukee's central city to assess the factors contributing to violence and develop solutions. According to Aldermen Michael Murphy, Robert Bauman, and Jose Perez, by taking the initiative to design, organize, and oversee such initiatives, Sarah “redefined the role” of the Council President Chief of Staff position.

“James R. Ryan Lifetime Achievement Award”

Kathleen Cooke

Superintendent, Hamilton School District

Kathleen Cooke is retiring after serving 23 years as Superintendent of the Hamilton School District. Among her accomplishments, she has presided over a series of advances in academic achievement by district students, approval of four referendums by voters for enhanced funding for school construction and operations, implementation of several building projects that were not subject to referendum, improvements in the district’s bond rating, and elimination of its OPEB liability. Kathleen has been honored by the Wisconsin State Reading Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators, and others for distinguished service and administrative acumen. In a recent newspaper article, School Board President Gabe Kolesari credited Kathleen for “work(ing) in partnership with staff, parents, community members, and business leaders to effect meaningful, positive change.”

“Norman N. Gill Award”

Dave Misky

Assistant Executive Director-Secretary, RACM

Dave Misky joined the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee (RACM) in 2003 and was appointed Assistant Executive Director-Secretary in 2008. He has led the agency’s redevelopment efforts with regard to the Menomonee Valley (including creation of Three Bridges Park); the Villard Library project; the 440th Local Redevelopment Plan; and current ambitious efforts at Century City and the Harbor District. Dave often is cited for his creative solutions to complex redevelopment challenges. Under his leadership, RACM has been a national leader in securing federal brownfield grants and Milwaukee has become an Environmental Protection Agency “showcase community.” He also helped to organize a unique Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund and has played a leading role in the City’s efforts to aggressively address tax delinquent and blighted properties. Christopher De Sousa, former chairman of urban planning at UWM, says “Milwaukee has become a national leader in sustainable redevelopment thanks to the vision and leadership of Dave Misky.”

The substantial number of outstanding nominations also prompted the Forum to award an Honorable Mention in the “Innovative Approach to Problem Solving” category:

- Milwaukee County Child Support Services for a series of initiatives to enhance customer service and support of families.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum (www.publicpolicyforum.org) – which was established in 1913 as a local government watchdog – is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of regional public policy issues.