

For release: Oct. 9, 2024

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## Forum announces Salute to Local Government award winners

**MILWAUKEE AND MADISON** –The Wisconsin Policy Forum is proud to announce its **2024 Salute to Local Government** award winners, as we recognize the best of our state’s public-sector agencies and workers. The 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Salute will celebrate 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, advancing racial equity, and public-private cooperation, as well as individuals in the public sector for excellence, as leaders of the future, and for lifetime achievement.

An additional award category, in partnership with UW-Madison’s La Follette School of Public Affairs, recognizes innovative performance in state government. Eligibility for Salute awards is for accomplishments or individual performance from our last nomination deadline until the present.

“At a time when partisan campaigns are fighting about the future of our politics, the Salute to Local Government is a reminder of the great things happening in the here and now,” said Wisconsin Policy Forum president Jason Stein. “The Salute gives us an opportunity to set aside our differences for a day and give the state’s best public servants the thanks that they don’t always hear.”

This year’s Salute will be held Nov. 13 at the Italian Community Center in Milwaukee. [Click here to learn more about the event and how to participate.](#) This year’s award recipients are:

### **Innovative approach to problem-solving**

*UW-Milwaukee, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, and MobilISE  
FlexRide Milwaukee*

FlexRide Milwaukee is an on-demand workforce transportation service connecting residents of Milwaukee neighborhoods with suburban job centers. It was launched as a pilot program in 2022 to address the spatial mismatch between city residents and suburban jobs. The service provides an on-demand solution to access hundreds of job locations that exist beyond the reach of transit. The FlexRide app works like Uber or Lyft: users enter their pickup and drop-off locations and are given a location to meet the FlexRide vehicle. They pay by credit or debit card or by purchasing vouchers with cash. After launch in 2022, ridership grew consistently, providing proof of concept that helped secure a \$4.2 million grant from the State, a \$1.3 million grant from Milwaukee County and funding from Waukesha County. Thus far, FlexRide Milwaukee has provided more than 90,000 rides to 5,000 Milwaukeeans, accessing 185 different job locations.

### **La Follette/Gladfelter Award for Innovation in State Government**

*Office of the State Public Defender  
Adam Plotkin*

As director of government and public affairs for the Office of the State Public Defender, Plotkin played a key role in creating the Criminal Justice Budget Coalition. It also includes the Department of

Justice, elected District Attorneys, Assistant District Attorneys, and the Director of State Courts Office. Its purpose is to examine state budgetary needs from a system-wide perspective, identifying individual requests that support the work of all stakeholders. Indicators of success since the coalition's inception include an increase of 65 new assistant district attorneys; an increase in the public defender rate paid to private attorneys taking cases from \$40 an hour to \$100 an hour; and significant pay raises for public defenders and district attorneys. All of these changes were advocated for many years individually but ultimately were realized with the coalition approach.

### **Effort to Advance Racial Equity**

*Whitewater Unified School District*

Community ESL Program of Whitewater

The Whitewater Adult ESL program provides English language instruction to area adults to help them better connect with the community and support their families. In addition to improving English language skills, students are able to work towards citizenship, learn basic computer literacy, and get information about local resources. The school district supports the ESL classes by providing a location, staff, and textbooks. The program also offers child care – staffed by bilingual adults who themselves grew up in Whitewater in Spanish-speaking households – to assist youth with homework and provide activities. Despite recent, highly publicized controversy about immigrants arriving in Whitewater, this program shows how the community is seeking to serve all of its residents and to advance racial equity.

### **Intergovernmental cooperation**

*Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee Area Technical College, and UW-Milwaukee*

M<sup>3</sup>

As a collaboration between Milwaukee's three urban public education institutions, M<sup>3</sup> (M-Cubed) seeks to ensure student success, in part by helping to connect learning to careers and improving student transitions between educational institutions. As the partnership approaches the close of its first decade, 700 MPS 12th-graders have earned 8,000 college credits at UW-Milwaukee or Milwaukee Area Technical College as part of M<sup>3</sup> College Connections, saving almost \$2.6 million in tuition. Meanwhile, nearly 900 MPS 11th-grade students in 2024 took advantage of M<sup>3</sup> Milwaukee Direct Admit, which allows juniors at any MPS high school to apply for free and be accepted into MATC and UWM. Nearly 1,000 MPS college-bound seniors participated in the first two years of Smart Start, which engages MPS students interested in college during the spring and summer before college, then helps them navigate starting at Milwaukee Area Technical College or UW-Milwaukee.

### **David G. Meissner Award for Public-Private Cooperation**

*Rusk County & OakLeaf Clinics*

Rusk County/OakLeaf Clinics Rural Healthcare Partnership

In January of 2023, Prevea announced the closure of clinics in northwest Wisconsin, including one in Ladysmith. This closure would have left only one healthcare option in the county. Rusk County leaders quickly recognized the need to intervene and acted on it, purchasing the former Prevea Clinic building in Ladysmith in April and securing a lease with OakLeaf Clinics to operate it starting in May. The county worked closely with OakLeaf to ensure that there would be no loss in services or providers with this transition. The lease agreement between Rusk County and OakLeaf outlines a buyback plan by which OakLeaf plans to take ownership of the building within five years. This undertaking is a testament to the good that can happen when public and private sector groups come together to work toward a common goal: providing access to quality healthcare.

### **Norman N. Gill Award for Individual Excellence**

*Milwaukee County*

Shakita LaGrant-McClain

Since being appointed in 2020 as Executive Director of Milwaukee County's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), LaGrant-McClain has helped to transform the delivery of those services in the county. She championed a new Marcia P. Cogg's Health and Human Services Center, scheduled to open in 2025, improving access to resources and services that address social determinants of health. LaGrant-McClain is committed to helping address the county's housing challenges, spearheading efforts to build new affordable housing. She has launched initiatives in the realms of public safety and youth services, while overseeing major changes in the county's behavioral health care system, capped by the opening of the county's new Mental Health Emergency Center, a joint venture with four private health systems, in 2022.

### **Jean B. Tyler Leader of the Future**

*Milwaukee County*

Isaac Rowlett

As Strategy Director for Milwaukee County, Rowlett has led its first enterprise-level strategic planning effort in two decades. This initiative was followed by his successful integration of the County's annual budget process with its strategic planning and performance management processes, a historic first for Milwaukee County. He also spearheaded the creation of the County's first-ever set of nested strategic plans at the department and office levels. Rowlett played a pivotal role in the creation of County Executive David Crowley's first policy agenda, helped to guide the distribution of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal COVID relief aid, and managed the county's first collaborative research with the City of Milwaukee to explore opportunities for service sharing between the two governments.

### **James R. Ryan Lifetime Achievement**

*City of Oshkosh*

Mark Rohloff

Since 2008, Rohloff has been city manager of Oshkosh, following stints as city administrator of Berlin and town administrator of Grand Chute. Rohloff's tenure in Oshkosh has included accomplishments such as creating the city's first strategic plan, implementing the city's downtown redevelopment plan, successfully negotiating to retain a Fortune 500 company headquarters for Oshkosh Corp., and negotiating redevelopment of a downtown site for the Milwaukee Bucks' affiliate, the Wisconsin Herd. Over the years, he has held multiple leadership roles with the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, League Mutual Insurance, and the Wisconsin City-County Management Association. Rohloff was instrumental in helping forge the coalition of local governments that successfully advocated in 2023 for state lawmakers to increase aid to municipalities and counties via the shared revenue program. In addition to his role with the city, Rohloff is has been an adjunct faculty member in the Master of Public Administration program at UW-Oshkosh.

### **James R. Ryan Lifetime Achievement (Posthumous)**

*Racine County*

Jonathan Delagrave

Racine County suffered a tragic loss in June with the unexpected death of County Executive Jonathan Delagrave, who suffered a heart attack while jogging. He was 51. A graduate of Case High School, Delagrave dedicated most of his professional life to improving the community where he grew up. He started with Racine County in 2003 in the Human Services Department before becoming director in 2010; he was elected county executive in 2015 and re-elected again in 2019 and 2023. His legacy includes his work on economic development, infrastructure development, and mental health services for Racine County. His accomplishments were only surpassed by his kindness and his inclusive and visionary leadership style. Delagrave's commitment to collaborating with partners

across the political spectrum was evidenced by the outpouring of condolences and praise for his leadership from Republicans and Democrats alike following his untimely passing.

The Forum would like to thank this year's Salute award judges: Anne Chapman, Theolia Carter, Maria Davis, Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf, Darryl Johnson, Alec Knutson, Kenneth Munson, Michelle Naples, Jordan Primakow, and Robert Whitaker.

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Salute to Local Government is sponsored by Bader, Baker Tilly, Clark Dietz, Dave Meissner, the Dubner Family, Ehlers, Kane Communications, Kapur & Associates, Kohl Philanthropies, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Mueller Communications, Northwestern Mutual, Potawatomi Hotel and Casino, Quarles, The Barry & Mary McNulty Family Charitable Fund, UW-Madison, Veolia, and We Energies.

Our sponsor for this year's keynote speaker -- Jim Paetsch, the longtime leader of the regional economic development entity known as Milwaukee 7 -- is Mueller Communications, and our media sponsor is Kane Communications.

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