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News release

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Workforce Development Board award winners announced

Honorees recognized for workforce advocacy, innovation, entrepreneurship

The Dakota-Scott Workforce Development Board (WDB) recently held its Legislative and Employer Awards event. Honorees included:

Mark McAfee Friend of Workforce Development Award

Steve Ditschler received the Mark McAfee Friend of Workforce Development Award. It is presented to an individual who has championed workforce issues at the local, state or federal level.

Ditschler, retiring CEO of Eagan-based ProAct, Inc., is a longtime member of the Dakota-Scott WDB. His leadership in workforce also extends to the state and national levels serving as a board member of the National Association of Workforce Boards and Minnesota's Governor's Workforce Development Board.

Bob Killeen Award

Ryan and Jen McGunnigle, owners of Las Tortillas Mexican Restaurant in Rosemount, received the Bob Killeen Award, which recognizes individuals or companies for their innovative or quality practices.

The City of Rosemount nominated Las Tortillas for quickly transforming its business model to safely operate during the pandemic. Their adaptations were innovative both in terms of their own business operations and their socially oriented work in Rosemount. Their partnerships enabled them to have an online ordering system up and running before the shutdown.

Additionally, in partnership with the Rosemount Family Resource Center, the McGunnigles served more than 6,000 meals to students within ISD 196. In October, the program was relaunched to offer free student lunches every Wednesday at the Rosemount Family Resource Center.

Business Champion Award

Mediacom Communications of Chaska received the Business Champion Award, which is presented to an outstanding company that uses CareerForce services such as the job fairs, job postings or training. Mediacom Communications is a large telecommunications provider in the U.S. offering coverage in smaller cities and towns.

Virginia Becker, workforce development specialist at the Burnsville CareerForce, said Mediacom continually uses CareerForce services, and she credited Barb Baedke Staebell, a Mediacom human resources supervisor.

“Barb has gone out of her way to assist job seekers during the hiring events and keeps communication going with all three CareerForce locations, so she is up-to-date on the status of our services being offered during the pandemic,” Becker said.

Bob Klas Sr. Entrepreneur Award

Tom Taylor, CEO of Shippers Resources Center in Burnsville, received the Bob Klas Sr. Entrepreneur Award, which recognizes a local entrepreneur success story.

Shippers Resource Center began 21 years ago in Eagan and moved to Burnsville in 2002. The company provides logistics technology, including transportation management software, other shipping software and logistics administrative services. Over the past five years the company has demonstrated impressive growth, doubling sales and the number of full-time employees.

Taylor is deeply involved in the community, and the company provides financial support to many local organizations.

Employer of the Year for People with Disabilities Award

Hy-Vee of Lakeville received the Employer of the Year for People with Disabilities Award, which recognizes an employer who hires, recruits, supports and retains people with disabilities.

Denise Leight, vocational associate program director at Placement Partners MN, Inc. nominated the store.

“HyVee in Lakeville is a great employer,” Leight said. “Brenda in Human Resources is a champion for workers with disabilities, and the front-end managers are very patient with the employees. They try to understand how individuals think, and Brenda holds special training sessions for staff with disabilities.”

Willis E. Branning Excellence in Youth Employment Services Award – Dakota County

Jan West, director of youth programs for Hired, received the Willis E. Branning Excellence in Youth Employment Services Awards for Dakota County. The award recognizes commitment to preparing young people to enter the workforce.

“The exceptional success of Hired’s youth work in Dakota County and throughout the Twin Cities is attributed to Jan West, who has spent more than 25 years serving opportunity youth in the Twin Cities,” said Julie Brekke, Hired executive director.

West began her career at Hired as a youth employment counselor working at Boys Totem Town where she coached young men in job search activities and worked to prepare them for employment upon their release. West subsequently created and directed the award-winning Building Lives Project, geared toward working with youth involved in the criminal justice system.

Willis E. Branning Excellence in Youth Employment Services Award – Scott County

Shakopee High School received the Willis E. Branning Excellence in Youth Employment Services Awards for Scott County.

Shakopee High School was nominated based on their innovative approach to career exploration and exposure by connecting with local business to introduce students to career pathways and real-world experiences. Shakopee Public Schools has been awarded the prestigious designation as a Ford Next Generation Learning Community due to their commitment to and work with this approach.