

**2017 Honoree Videos**

Willie McShan (6:21)	Milwaukee	<a href="https://vimeo.com/244844809">https://vimeo.com/244844809</a>
MEC (Mayville Engineering Co.) (4:05)	Mayville, WI	<a href="https://vimeo.com/244844071">https://vimeo.com/244844071</a>
David Brann (4:49)	Madison	<a href="https://vimeo.com/244842547">https://vimeo.com/244842547</a>
Northwest Hardwoods (4:16)	Onalaska, WI	<a href="https://vimeo.com/244843402">https://vimeo.com/244843402</a>

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Winners Announced for 2017 Wisconsin Job Honor Awards**

**Initiative aims to employ disadvantaged jobseekers by celebrating “A New Kind of Hero”**

MADISON, WI — The Wisconsin Job Honor Awards, an initiative aimed at recognizing Wisconsinites who have overcome barriers to employment, has announced its top honorees for 2017.

The awards were presented on Nov. 29 in Madison during the Future Wisconsin Summit hosted by Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC). Several hundred Wisconsin business leaders assembled to witness the ceremony, in which biographical videos described honoree efforts to win life-changing jobs.

One of this year’s success stories is Willie McShan of Milwaukee. As a youth in Racine, McShan joined the criminal gang Black Disciples. “Being somewhat ambitious, I always wanted to be climbing the ladder of recognition,” said McShan, “even though it was the wrong ladder.” After serving 26 years in prison McShan was determined to move beyond his criminal past, but a series of low-paying, dead-end jobs led him to the brink of despair. He was introduced to the Joseph Project: a faith-based initiative founded by Pastor Jerome Smith of Greater Praise Church of God in Christ, an inner-city church in Milwaukee. With support from U.S. Senator Ron Johnson, the Joseph Project inspires and equips jobseekers to win career-track jobs. After completing the training McShan interviewed with automotive parts-manufacturer Nemak in Sheboygan. He was offered a job. After nearly two years at Nemak, McShan continues to thrive. “Right off the bat, Willie possessed the right mindset,” said human resources manager Thomas Baird of Nemak, “He’s actually grown into a training position ... So he’s been a key person for us in that particular area.”

Senator Ron Johnson, a founding supporter of The Joseph Project, extended his congratulations to McShan. “All work has value. The way out of poverty is through the dignity of work, earning your own success,” said Senator Johnson, “There are so many good workers here in Milwaukee; they’re just trapped in this cycle of poverty and dependency and despair. They’re capable of joining your organization and contributing significantly to it. Willie is a prime example of that.”

Sharing employee honors is David Brann who works as a pre-cook at Lucille, a Madison-based restaurant. Executive chef Evan Dannells partners with Goodwill of South Central Wisconsin to recruit workers with disabilities into an industry that is notoriously short on talent. “This is actually just an alternative labor force,” said Dannells, “I can’t stress enough that it isn’t a free ride. David’s an actual employee who has actual expectations, and he’s productive.” Brann’s co-workers, friends and family and have observed a transformation in his personality. “We’ve watched him come out of his shell, and that really felt good,” said Dannells, “He has improved everyone’s life around here.” David expresses

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gratitude for the employment opportunity, saying “From the first day, I just started loving it more and more.”

In the employer category, Mayfield Engineering Company, Inc. (MEC) and Northwest Hardwoods, Inc. of Onalaska were honored for their commitment to hire disadvantaged candidates, including people with criminal convictions and developmental disabilities. MEC has found success partnering with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections work release program, among other initiatives. Ron Kelly, one of several “ex-offenders” hired by MEC through this program, describes his new job as life-changing: “This is one of the best things that ever happened to me,” said Kelly, “This is a new life.” MEC’s HR manager Cliff Sanderson says “The greatest way that we can give back is to give them meaningful employment and make them productive members of society. And those individuals go on to become great employees.”

Northwest Hardwoods in Onalaska partners with Aurora Vocational Services, a local disability employment agency. Mark Wells, general manager of Northwest Hardwoods, repeats a refrain common among Wisconsin employers: “The unemployment rate in this state is incredible. Everybody is out there competing for the same people.” After hiring people with developmental disabilities from Aurora, Wells said “ These people possess the qualities that Northwest Hardwoods embodies: Drive, determination, desire. We have to adapt, we have to adapt to a changing workforce. They’re here every day and, and they’re very big contributors to the success of the Northwest Hardwoods. This is a huge untapped market [of workers].”

Lead sponsor of the Wisconsin Job Honor Awards is Milwaukee-based ManpowerGroup. Launched in Iowa in 2014, the awards are expanding nationally under the banner of America’s Job Honor Awards.

“Our society celebrates lottery winners, movie stars and professional athletes,” notes founder Kyle Horn. “We rarely hear inspiring stories of individuals whose lives are transformed through the hard work and perseverance that leads to meaningful employment. It’s time for a new kind of hero.”

## **About the Wisconsin Job Honor Awards:**

The Wisconsin Job Honor Awards celebrates Wisconsinites who overcome barriers to employment, and the employers who hire them. WI-JHA’s mission is to rekindle hope and energize the work ethic across Wisconsin, through the celebration of a new kind of hero. [www.JobHonor.org](http://www.JobHonor.org). Lead sponsor of the Awards is **ManpowerGroup**, world leader in innovative workforce solutions.

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