

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Winners Announced for *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 2016.

Nominations were submitted via the organization's website and judged by a panel of workforce experts. Hosted by Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC) during their Future Wisconsin Economic Summit in Madison, the Second Annual Wisconsin Job Honor Awards was presented on Thursday at the Monona Terrace Community & Convention Center. Several hundred Wisconsin business leaders assembled to witness the ceremony, in which biographical videos described honoree efforts to win life-changing jobs.

One such honoree is Jordan Holter of La Crosse. After a “normal childhood” filled with sports and family vacations, Holter experimented with methamphetamine in 2006. The drug quickly took control of his life. “I didn’t even go to Christmas one year,” Holter recalled, “because I thought my parents were going to have me arrested.” Eventually he was arrested on felony drug charges. While in jail he became involved with Project Proven, a program that helps offenders re-integrate into society through education and employment. While completing industrial maintenance coursework at Western Technical College, Holter was hired by Great Lakes Cheese as a Maintenance Apprentice. “I love my job,” says Holter, “I’ve seen life at its lowest, and I’ve seen where a new path can lead. Now I want to be a light for other addicts.”

Alondra Trinidad Reyes Ponce immigrated from Mexico at age 7. “The first thing I saw was snow,” she recalls, “and I didn’t even know what it was.” She soon adapted to life in Wisconsin. Then came a blow that might have derailed her academic dreams: She became homeless at age 17. School officials recognized her vulnerability and recommended Middle College — a high school/community college collaboration designed to nurture and academically challenge students at risk of not meeting their potential in traditional high school. Alondra thrived in Middle College, and later began an internship at Wisconsin Dialysis in Madison. She’s now a Dialysis Technician Trainee with dreams of becoming a pediatrician. “People here give you chances,” says Alondra, “But it’s up to you to work hard to get there.”

Two organizations were also honored for their innovative efforts to support disadvantaged jobseekers. In Milwaukee, Pro Trade and Mindful Staffing Solutions were launched independently by childhood friends Rashaad Washington and Reginald Reed, Jr. “We’re both trying to help the people,” says Washington “and we decided that we are better together.” Washington and Reed recruit at-risk residents of the inner city, training them in personal development and construction trades during a rigorous 14-week program. A graduate of the program, Pierre J. Jackson, credits the program with changing his life. After struggling to find work with a felony conviction “They saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself, says Jackson, who now works as an insulation installer for Builders’ Insulation in Germantown.

Also receiving employer honors is Larson Companies of Eau Claire, an asset management company operating hotels and restaurants in the upper Midwest. Dawn Edlin, Chief People Officer for Larson Companies, struggled to find good candidates for their hospitality positions. She eventually partnered

with Serryn Hawkins, her local representative from Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development – Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. "Serryn makes my job easy," says Edlin. The two collaborated to create an in-house training program they dubbed the Hospitality Training Academy. Beginning with an eight-week training program for housekeepers, their success has motivated Edlin to expand the initiative: "In January 2017 I'll be adding cooks, and eventually front desk reps," she says. Dick Larson, founder of Larson Companies, says the results speak for themselves. "[People with disabilities] seem to do a better job in many cases than people who don't have any challenges. We look at results, and based on that these people are outstanding."

Individual honorees received checks for \$500, and all four honorees received engraved crystal trophies.

Lead sponsor of the Wisconsin Job Honor Awards is Milwaukee-based ManpowerGroup, and event host for the December 15 celebration is the WMC Foundation. "WMC is proud to sponsor the Wisconsin Job Honor Awards to shine a light on people and companies doing extraordinary things," said Kurt R. Bauer, WMC President/CEO. "There are many similar scenarios from companies across the Badger State, and we are honored to help tell those stories."

Kyle Horn, founder and director of America's Job Honor Awards, congratulated this year's honorees. "Wisconsin is celebrating a new kind of hero," says Horn. "These amazing honorees demonstrate that Wisconsinites who overcome patterns of failure or challenges such as disability are not only highly qualified employees, but frequently they demonstrate remarkable work ethic and loyalty."

Honoree videos can be viewed at the organization's website, www.JobHonor.org.

About the Wisconsin Job Honor Awards:

The Wisconsin Job Honor Awards celebrates Wisconsinites who have overcome barriers to employment, and the employers who hire them. WIJHA's mission is to rekindle hope and energize the work ethic across Wisconsin, through the celebration of a new kind of hero.

Lead sponsor of the Awards is **ManpowerGroup**, world leader in innovative workforce solutions.

About ManpowerGroup

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About WMC

Founded in 1911, Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC) is the state's chamber of commerce and largest business trade association representing more than 3,700 employers of every size and from every sector of the economy. The WMC Foundation is an integral part of WMC and is dedicated to building a better future for Wisconsin by providing business and economics education, workforce

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development initiatives, local chambers of commerce support, safety training programs and sharing business best practices. www.wmc.org

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