

Volunteers Honored with Virtual Community Volunteer Awards

Madison, WI (April 13, 2021) – After a year of pause due to COVID-19, United Way of Dane County is happy to formally announce the recipients of the 2020 Community Volunteer Awards!

For more than 20 years, we've recognized the incredible champions for change in Dane County through the Community Volunteer Awards. And while we typically gather in person to celebrate their commitment to this community, this year we're taking time to celebrate our award recipients and nominees virtually as part of National Volunteer Month.

The Community Volunteer Awards highlight the enormous benefits volunteers bring to Dane County. Leading by example, the nominees and award recipients encourage everyone to engage in their community through volunteerism.

"This month, we are celebrating some of our community's most dedicated volunteers," said Renee Moe, President & CEO of United Way of Dane County. "These individuals and organizations play a key role in championing change in our community. While their passion, dedication and commitment are always an inspiration, they've made such an incredible impact during this historically difficult time. Coming together to meet crisis with generosity and hard work, they've helped us meet the increase in need and remain committed to helping our community recover. Thank you, volunteers, for all you do. You are the real change-makers in Dane County!"

In 2020, [more than 105 individuals and groups were nominated](#). Recipients will receive \$500-\$1,000 to be given to the nonprofit for which they volunteer.

While Dane County has a strong history of community volunteerism, we're more grateful now than ever before for the work being done by these groups and individuals. With COVID-19 sparking an increase in needs across our community, volunteers stepped up. Pivoting to at-home or physically distanced on-site projects, we were able to activate more than 100 volunteers and provide more than 4,000 packs for families in need – including snack packs, paper product packs, backpacks and diaper packs – to nonprofit partners with a total economic impact of \$11,172. Additionally, nine of our corporate partners facilitated volunteer engagements and a total of 5,618 volunteers responded to active posts on VolunteerYourTime.org throughout 2020.

As the pandemic continues on and we begin working toward recovery, there's still an increased need for volunteerism! Join us for Seasons of Caring: Spring Into Action from April 18-24 – simply visit [VolunteerYourTime.org](https://www.volunteeryourtime.org) to find a list of current opportunities today.

The Community Volunteer Awards would not be possible without the generous support from our sponsors: UW Credit Union, Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin, Hooper Corporation, J.H. Findorff & Son Inc., Madison Gas and Electric, TASC and Vogel Bros. Building Co. We are also very thankful for our media sponsors: WKOW TV and WORT 89.9 FM, and our award sponsors: United Way's Business Volunteer Network, Dane County Administrators of Volunteer Services, the Irwin A. and Robert D. Goodman Fund in the United Way of Dane County Foundation and Goodman's Jewelers.

2020 Award Recipients:

See the full list of recipients and nominees [here](#).

Mike McKinney Award (\$1,000 donation) (named for a longtime Madison newscaster, volunteer, mentor and Community Volunteer Award emcee, who passed away in 2006): A dedicated role-model for change, **Carola Gaines** volunteers at F.O.S.T.E.R, the Foundation for Black Women’s Wellness, an Opioid Crisis Organization, the Motivational MD, Mt Zion Baptist Church and the sorority Delta Sigma Theta – and all in addition to her 50-hour work week! While many don’t know how she does it, her nominator describes her as “the Energizer Bunny.” Carola has always had a heart of service that drives her to give, and that heart of hers has made an incredible impact on our community over many years. Well-deserving of this year’s Mike McKinney Award, Carola brings people together, identifies resources and helps to problem-solve wherever she can. While her work may often happen behind the scenes (in the form of desk work or fundraising) she is known as a force of good across the volunteer community and beyond. And, as her nominator writes, “Carola gives all of herself to the community, even with a very busy life.”

Goodman Gemstone Youth Award (\$1,000 donation and \$1,000 scholarship) (sponsored by the Goodman Fund in the United Way of Dane County Foundation, gemstone pin generously provided to recipient by Goodman’s Jewelers): From the time **Jaleah Hunt** was a little girl, giving back to her community has been a top priority. Alongside her mother, Jackie Hunt, Jaleah has participated in numerous community activities through their family nonprofit, F.O.S.T.E.R., including putting together Christmas and Thanksgiving baskets for families in need, assembling back-to-school bags, serving at the pre-Mother’s Day brunch and so much more! Jaleah also plays an active role in helping to coach and mentor her peers – her leadership skills at such a young age are nothing short of inspiring. While Jaleah’s path hasn’t always been easy, having been in the Dane County Foster Care system from 18-months of age until she was adopted at age 5, it has been guided by her struggle in a way that helps to improve the life experiences of others who are experiencing hardships. This award is a well-deserved recognition for her dedication and passionate service to our community.

Kathy Martinson Youth Award (\$500 donation and \$500 scholarship) (named in honor of Kathy Martinson who brought the Community Volunteer Awards to Dane County in 1990 and her 35 years of dedicated service to community volunteerism): As an immigrant from India, **Shruti Parthasarathy** faced a great deal of challenges throughout her school years in Dane County. From her experiences, she recognized a need to promote an attitude of acceptance and racial harmony in our community. So, tapping into her passion for dance, she founded Calm with Kalaa, an initiative to promote and celebrate diversity through the 2,000-year-old Indian classical dance, Bharatanatyam. Within just one month of founding this program, she had taught 100 students – and in the few months after that, she had implemented her program into her high school curriculum! Her workshop has truly helped students to appreciate and celebrate all cultures and traditions. Her determination, grit and enthusiasm are an inspiration to behold, and her sunny disposition helps to uplift those around her. Now, a college student at Yale University, Shruti continues to research more artistic and cultural therapies that can help to heal the racial and cultural divide and bring people together to a place of understanding – a much-needed and appreciated contribution to the Dane County community (and beyond!).

Business Champion Award (\$1,000 donation) (sponsored by United Way's Business Volunteer Network): This year, we're recognizing **Exact Sciences** with the Business Champion Award. While they stepped up to help with substantial financial and in-kind donations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, their recognition is driven by the role they played in helping Gilda's Club through a challenging time. In 2018, catastrophic flooding caused over \$1.3 Million in damages to the Gilda's Club clubhouse – and Exact Sciences didn't hesitate to step in. They donated six months of cost-free office space at Exact Sciences facilities and provided technical support to make sure that Gilda's Club could continue to provide free cancer support as they recovered – proving their dedication to being a part of the change in Dane County.

Nonprofit Champion Award (\$1,000 donation) (sponsored by Dane County Administrators of Volunteer Services): This year's Nonprofit Champion Award goes to **NAMI of Dane County!** While community members nominated many dedicated and deserving nonprofits in Dane County, NAMI stands out. They work tirelessly to provide essential education around mental illness, with the goal to put an end to the stigmas so often associated with these health issues – an effort that is especially important during this historically difficult time. NAMI advocates at the local, state and national levels for increased funding and better access to quality mental health services. They are a FREE resource for people in our community who may not be able to afford the resources and care they deserve. Thank you, NAMI, for all you do!

Lifetime Service Award (\$1,000 donation): **Alejandro Vergara** is being recognized with this year's esteemed Lifetime Service Award! Nominated by St. Vincent de Paul (SVdP), Alejandro has served as a pharmacy volunteer at SVdP for three years, and is now a highly valued board member, bringing his commitment to the organization and work experience as an executive in charge of international operations at Hy Cite Enterprises along with him. During his time with SVdP, Alejandro has volunteered over 360 hours in their pharmacy, helping Spanish-speaking clients to feel at ease when picking up their medications. And while the past three years have certainly been noteworthy for Alejandro, his passion for giving back started early. As a child, he volunteered for the St. Vincent de Paul in his home country of Columbia – going on visits with his father to folks living in poverty, bringing along food, SVdP vouchers and words of encouragement for his neighbors in need. Alejandro is truly an inspiration to all, and his contribution to this community is invaluable.

Outstanding Leadership Award (\$500 donation): A passionate and dedicated leader in our community, **Yesenia Villalpando-Torres** is the recipient of this year's Outstanding Leadership Award. Currently a Social Worker for the Office of Immigration Affairs in the Department of Human Services, Yesenia has focused her life's work around being an advocate for undocumented and DACAmented students. After the many ICE incidents and raids in September of 2017, Yesenia worked with local schools to support children and teachers in processing and getting through a very traumatizing and difficult time. She is a leader and advocate for the Madison community, and does not hesitate to take action on behalf of underrepresented groups in need of support. In a time of great racial and cultural unrest, Yesenia has provided much-needed leadership, strength and initiative on behalf of

our community. And as a fierce champion for change in Dane County, we could not think of an individual more deserving of this award.

Distinguished Service Award (\$500 donation): **Iris Christenson**, a retired attorney who volunteers with the CMC Immigration Legal Services Program, is one of this year's recipients of the Distinguished Service Award. While Iris has a background in law, she's worked hard during her retirement to grow her knowledge and learn more about immigration law so that she can help CMC clients in ways that other volunteers cannot – helping them prepare immigration applications and find the best path towards citizenship. Iris is truly passionate about helping immigrants and goes above and beyond when an opportunity comes up to offer a client extra help. Her unique legal skillset, passion and drive continues to make a big difference in the lives of people who are looking to make Dane County their permanent home.

Distinguished Service Award (\$500 donation): Described by her nominator as a “one-woman volunteer army,” **Martha Galston** is one of this year's recipients of the Distinguished Service Award. Three days a week, Martha serves as the East Madison Community Center's (EMCC) Office Assistant, greeting the public and providing clients with crucial information. Additionally, she spends one day each week coordinating EMCC's weekly food pantry, which involves overseeing the six-hour pantry process where she meets individually with clients for intake and guidance. Her wide range of skills, can-do attitude (in spite of difficult health issues) and gentle, supportive nature put her in a league of her own – a volunteer that EMCC says they couldn't do without! Because thanks to Martha's contributions, EMCC is able to maintain a great reputation and help the families they serve feel welcome and at ease. Thank you, Martha, for your dedication!

###

About United Way of Dane County:

United Way of Dane County has been tackling Dane County's toughest challenges for 99 years. With a mission to unite the community to achieve measurable results and change lives, we are committed to build a Dane County where everyone can succeed in school, work and life. Through strategic partnerships and collaborative work, United Way brings the many voices of Dane County together to find common ground and develop a strategic architecture for change, while engaging businesses and individuals to give, advocate and volunteer in Dane County. Together, we are The Power of Many. Working for All.