

Mayor's Medal of Honor Awards

December 10, 2020



Media Packet

Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Danny Solis

Artistic / Cultural Achievement Award

I'm pleased to announce my nomination for the Artistic / Cultural Achievement goes to Danny Solis. I've known Danny since the days of the old art salon on 1st Avenue 6-7 years ago, recalling the first year he began the Day of the Dead Poetry Slam, which has now grown into a staple annual event.

He's been a true visionary to diverse and inclusively original programming to Rochester's Arts and Culture scene. His work in the community, artistic outreach, spoken word energy, and support of the arts for all ages is more than deserving of the Mayor's Medal of Honor. Danny Solis deserves this recognition and I fully support the privilege of passing the torch to such an important community member and asset to the arts and cultural of our fine city.

Presented by Tyler Aug, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Omar Nur

Champion of Diversity Award

I enthusiastically propose Mr. Omar Nur for the Champion of Diversity Award, Mayor's Medal of Honor. Omar Nur carries on with pride his involvement as a community leader and activist building a more inclusive Rochester community. He is an ambassador of the Somali American culture contributing his time and efforts for the betterment of a welcoming community for all. Mr. Nur is involved and engaged within WSU, UMR, RCTC, Rochester Public and Charter Schools by supporting and advocating for immigrants of Olmsted County through education. Within RHCP, a health promotion initiative, Mr. Nur along with other immigrant servant leadership has contributed and outreached to Somali American community while advocating for the power of collective data to shape social change for the shared goal of health equity and civic engagement. Mr. Nur also creates cultural bridges with his involvement in the areas of health and cultural programs that promote success for the Somali American community, showing his commitment to making Rochester an inclusive community. Mr. Nur extends himself passionately to meet personally with youth and adults, understanding difficulties and barriers that underserved immigrants face to bring their voices to those in city and county offices and beyond other leaderships in the SE area of MN. It would be wonderful to see him recognized for his volunteer work and commitment to the City of Rochester.

Presented by Miriam Goodson, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Peg Winters

Community-Wide Service Award

Volunteering runs in the family Peg Winters will tell you. As a volunteer for with Family Service Rochester (FSR) for six years, AARP Tax Aide Program for 8, United Way 10, Quarry Hill Nature Center for 8, and Girl Scouts her entire adult life—there isn't a day that goes by the Peg isn't contributing of her time, talent and treasure somewhere in Rochester. With the onset of COVID 19, Peg took on a key role volunteering 30 hours a week with food distribution, Meals on Wheels and senior services in general at FSR. By May, Peg was coordinating volunteers and community partners with FSR on new services created to address community and individual challenges related to COVID 19. With so many moving parts and daily pandemic changes, having Peg's management skills and can-do attitude meant staff could pivot the organization and keep up with the daily needs of our seniors and families. Jessica Thornton describes Peg's contribution this way. "As FSR's Volunteer Coordinator I work with Peg every day—she's awesome! She is confident in her abilities and therefore, makes a great team leader; teaching others the steps needed to succeed. She always looks at the big picture when working on any project, focusing on the impact on the consumer, staff and volunteers. Listening to Peg visit with consumers she is always gracious and reassuring that their request will be done promptly and to their expectations. I am able to bounce ideas off Peg knowing her insights will improve our outcome." While Peg continues her 30+ hours a week with FSR, she is also back helping at Quarry Hill volunteering with outdoor education and science classes. Executive Director Pam Meyer describes Peg in the following way; Peg embraces our values—commitment to community, education, diversity. We can't do what we do without people like Peg, she is lovely--the way she connects with kids. Peg is just a joy to have on our team of volunteers. We are so lucky she chooses to invest her time with all of us at Quarry Hill".

Nominated by April Sutor

Presented by Danielle Teal, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Nicole Andrews

Educational Excellence Award

Nicole Andrews has worked as an educator with several agencies around Rochester and is currently working as the School Readiness Supervisor for Rochester Public Schools. In that role, she makes daily connections with preschool families who are receiving a scholarship. She also works to provide family events and home visits for these families. She also supports our preschool classrooms with curriculum and data support. Nicole regularly makes sure that the scholars' educational needs are met as well as their home needs. She is extremely resourceful. And this sometimes takes shape as an active participant in community activities such as winter clothes drives. During the coronavirus pandemic, Nicole has worked with families to ensure they have devices, basic needs met, and that they are able to easily access their child's education. Her role as an educator doesn't stop with Rochester Public Schools. In addition to her work with early childhood students and families, Nicole has an active role in the community with several local non-profit organizations. She serves on boards for the United Way of Olmsted County, Families First of Minnesota, Hope Fuse, and the Interfaith Hospitality Network. In addition to her leadership in various organizations, she is a dedicated advocate for social justice and uses her voice to bring awareness to the community through various public forums. She recently co-authored the article Antiracism 101 for Rochester Women Magazine and participated in community events during the summer months to bring awareness to racial inequities. Nicole is passionate about serving the children and families in the Rochester community and she works tirelessly to bring positive change to those most in need in our city. This also includes working for better living conditions for those who suffer from homelessness. She has been part of Mayor Norton's task force on homelessness and is eager to lend her expertise in community forums that look at providing appropriate supports in our city. As an educator, Nicole's work has impacted many in our city, and that is why she deserves the Educational Excellence Award.

Presented by Natalia Benjamin, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Terry Spaeth

Excellence in City Service Award

A year ago, Mayor Norton honored me with a Medal of Honor for Excellence in City Service... I am pleased to be able to introduce this year's award winner. During my over 30 years as a department head with the City of Rochester, I have worked with and come to know many exceptional public servants. Most of these individuals work behind the scenes... doing the heavy lifting that propels both the City organization and our community forward... and they do so without fanfare... without seeking the limelight... because they feel a duty to go above and beyond to accomplish the people's work.

This year's recipient always steps-up to do whatever needs to be done to get things accomplished... no matter the hour or length of time that it takes to complete the task. If a City employee doesn't know where to find some information... if you seek this person out... he probably knows where to find that data... no matter how buried the paperwork, obscure the file, or complex the citation. If you need a sounding board or listening ear... he will make the time to really hear what you are trying to say, play it back so that you can hear yourself, and, sometimes offer fresh language to make your point-of-view more palatable or persuasive.

I have watched this year's recipient rise through the ranks of his department... from support role through middle management... to senior leadership. He has more than earned his stripes because we all know how things run, right... shall we say?... downstream. This person never fails to step-up... this person never fails to pick-up a dropped ball. And he does so in good humor, harboring no ill-will for the one who actually fumbled the ball. What matters to this person is that the municipal organization and the people we serve win the game.

On more than one occasion I have witnessed this person take the proverbial bullet that was meant for someone else... the personification of resilience, I think. This person is a tough cookie... no push-over. The person understands boundaries... those lines that should not be crossed. That's not to say that this person doesn't enjoy coloring outside the lines though. After all... like me... this person is a Packer backer... and bleeding green-and-gold can be a difficult thing to do in this Nordic land dominated by Vikings fans.

By now you have probably discerned who I am pleased to recognize... so... without further ado, please join me in applauding my good friend and colleague, Terry Spaeth.

Presented by Steve Schmidt, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Jennifer Becker

Excellence in Industry Award

Jennifer Becker is the epitome of excellence in the hospitality industry. For decades, she has been a fixture in the Rochester hospitality community - from serving as the Food and Beverage Director at the Rochester Golf and Country Club, to being the driving force behind unique events and a superior customer experience at "Rochester's Best Restaurant" Bleu Duck Kitchen - and she does it all with positivity and grace. In addition to creating wonderful experiences in her restaurant, she volunteers her time and talent to enhance events for nonprofits and community organizations, contributing goods and services to these groups.

She continues to demonstrate her brilliance by adapting without hesitation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. She and her team have adjusted their business model numerous times to provide safe and innovative ways to sustain their business and continue to serve the community. I can't think of an individual more deserving of this award. Although she will say she hasn't done it alone, I know those who know and work with her would agree that she is the glue that holds it all together, and join me in celebrating this great leader.

Presented by Naura Anderson, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

April Sutor & Kelli DeCook

Human Services Award

This year's Human Services Award is jointly given to two women in our community who have went above and beyond their professional roles of leading initiatives that address child well-being and senior independence. Since the start of the pandemic, they pushed themselves and others to find creative solutions to do more to ensure our most vulnerable neighbors have access to warm clothing, personal protective equipment, and diapers. They facilitated a tremendous increase in the number of meals delivered through Meals on Wheels, including meals for homeless individuals and those impacted by COVID 19. But it does not stop there together, they have secured grants and donations in excess of \$300,000 to fund this important work. Through their relentless drive to ensure no one would go without, working long hours, nights and weekend, they have impacted the lives of 1000's in the Rochester area. This year, I am honored to present the 2020 Mayor's Medal of Honor for Human Services to April Sutor and Kelli DeCook of Family Service Rochester.

Presented by JoMarie Morris, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Elaine Case

Legacy Award

Last year I received the Legacy Award for long time service to this community. When I accepted it, I looked around the room and saw many people in the room who had donated much of their time, talent and money to get things done for the betterment of the Community and I was humbled. It is my honor to pass that award to another person who is a huge community resource and has been consistently involved in this community for many years.

Our Legacy winner 2020 does not stand around and complain about major problems, her leadership style is that of a collaborator in the highest sense of the word. She gets directly involved and has played many roles, on planning, advisory committees, as well as officers over the past 10+ years. She has shared her knowledge (as board member, board development, strategic planning facilitator, fundraising, etc) in the following organizations, the United Way, Cradle to Career, Jeremiah Program, Diversity Council, Bolder Options, Boys and Girls Club, Elder Care Network, People's Food Coop, Public Library Foundation, Ready to Lead, Choral Arts Ensemble, just to name a few.

More specifically she was the leader within Rotary for the creation of the Cradle to Career initiative which impacts every aspect of education from birth to post-secondary to careers. This program currently impacts thousands of people. She was an early supporter and leader of the Jeremiah Program which supports and develops single moms two generations at a time.

She has done a lot since coming to the community in 1981. Elaine Case is a former IBM manager and the executive responsible for marketing with worldwide business partners for midrange systems, after she retired in 2011 she used her world wide expertise and marketing skills to become heavily involved in Rotary programs from the student mentoring STRIVE program and literacy efforts and served as club president in 2015 -2016. She is a true role model and mentor for many in the community. She indeed is a gem to be treasured and honored.

Her Hobbies include traveling, gardening, reading, entertaining, long distance hiking, as well as knitting (a recent COVID pandemic activity!). Her talents are many - planner, organizer, team player, most importantly getting things done for the betterment of the community. She was the recipient of the Outstanding Philanthropist of the Year (2020 from the Association of Fundraising Professionals-SEMN), Maude Finch Award (2017 from the United Way of Olmsted County, and the Choral Advocacy Award (2014 from the Choral Arts Ensemble). I am honored to recommend Elaine Case for the 2020 Legacy award.

Presented by George Thompson, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

David Morrill

Mayor's Award

Dave was described by his many nominators using words such as perseverance, determined, collaborative, consensus builder, quiet, humble, strong interpersonal and engineering skills. He utilized those skills and more as he worked on the *Save The Track* effort regarding Soldiers Field oval running track. Dave was respected for the time he invested to assure a community asset that was top quality and best for the users. His efforts also helped save the city money as he utilized his time and talent to research and educate on options to improve our historic track while maintaining a soft surface desired by runners. The completed track can now be better utilized by the Park Department, neighborhood, running clubs and others for many years to come. Dave also serves on the Board of Directors for the Engineering Alliance of Minnesota and works with the Friends of Silver Lake.

Presented by Mayor Kim Norton



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Jason Zylstra

Personal Achievement Award

Jason Zylstra is someone I have admired for over two decades for his ability to overcome barriers and find the positive aspects of all situations. Jason was born with Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita, a muscle disease that causes multiple joint contractures. He has found creative ways to accomplish tasks that others do without even thinking about such as getting dressed, eating and learning to drive.

Jason has had a love for sports his entire life. He has excelled at floor hockey, bowling and is currently a very competitive billiards player in a community league. Jason has shared this passion for sports as a softball, soccer and floor hockey coach. He has also been a familiar site at area ball diamonds as a youth baseball umpire, covering a lot of ground in his wheelchair to make the call.

Jason has been employed at Mayo Clinic for over 15 years in telecommunications and is proud to call Rochester his home. He has been active in the community with his involvement with the Southeastern Minnesota Center for Independent Living and as the President of the Rochester Area Disabled Athletics and Recreation Board.

He and his wife Stacie have a teenage son, Harmon. Jason especially loves baseball and even though he dreamed of playing baseball, he put his energy in to helping out a high school team with the scorebook and being the number one fan of his brother and son - cheering them on all the way!

Jason's son says it best, "My Dad has taught me to never give up and to keep trying no matter what - never say you can't do something."

Presented by Andy Brownell, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Monica Taylor

Senior/Elder Achievement Award

Monica Taylor knows the need to listen to and encourage Seniors. A resident of the Fairway Ridge Housing community she is a past chairman and current co-chair of the Social Committee. She organizes gatherings for luncheons, suppers, Veteran's Day, and seasonal celebrations. She brings her energy and support to special projects which raise money for such charities as Landings, Channel One, and St. Vincent de Paul Society. In these recent months she works with others to "get the work done" despite the quarantine and keeping everyone safe.

Monica has a sincere heart for the well-being of Seniors and her dedication reflects this. She drives residents to appointments, furnishes meals at times for residents who are alone, escorts residents as they move to facilities with more care so family can move belongs. Monica will call former residents to let them know they are not forgotten. Her concern for raising the spirits of residents during these months has resulted in posters and signs in elevators, personal notes and cards on resident doors and personalized gifts thanking residents for their participation in projects. Monica and her husband, Lewis, are also active members of the Senior Ambassadors at Holy Spirit Catholic Church.

Presented by Jeanette Fortier, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Kelly Rae Kirkpatrick

Sustainability Award

The person that I nominated for the sustainability award this year has done numerous things to create a more livable, sustainable, and resilient Rochester.

As a Master Gardener, she freely shares knowledge and tips to anyone wanting to learn including classes at the Boys and Girls Club, and through Northrop Community Education. She spoke at the Lifestyle Medicine Wellness Symposium about agriculture's impact on our soil and water. She helped set up many community gardens including the recent ones at ALC school and MLK park where the food will help sustain neighborhood families. This first year the MLK garden produced over 500 pounds of produce given out to the neighborhood.

As a Rochester Master Water Steward, she launched a Smart Salting campaign to help keep salt contamination out of our city storm water system, is active with and spreads the word about the Adopt-a-Drain Program, the Boulevards and Bio-Swales Project, the Green Thumb Initiative, and many other sustainability programs.

As if that weren't enough, she started the Plant-a-Seed organization to promote increased food security and a greater understanding of our food system; and last year co-founded The Seed Library at the Rochester Public Library where they gave away over 12,000 packets of seeds. As you may know by now, I am talking about Kelly Rae Kirkpatrick.

Kelly is also a committee member of the newly forming Transition Rochester, a movement of communities around the world coming together to reimagine and rebuild a more sustainable and resilient community. It is for all these reasons that I enthusiastically introduce Kelly Rae Kirkpatrick as the 2020 Mayor's Medal of Honor recipient for Sustainability.

Presented by Ivan Idso, 2019 Honoree



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020

Yezi Gugsu

Youth Serving Community Award

Yezi, is a Senior at Mayo High School and has been very active at serving on the Student Council and as the Student Body President. She has also served or still serves on the Student School Board, Diversity Committee, Youth Commission, Mayors Youth Council, Key Club, National Honor Society and plays volleyball. This past year Yezi, along with several other peers, began the group Rochester Community Initiative (RCI) which served to highlight the inequities and injustices that fall on BIPOC communities as a response to the death of George Floyd. Yezi and her peers planned and executed several peaceful marches and safe protests in order share her personal stories and was a catalyst for others to do the same. Her nominator described the effect to "personalize, humanize and localize the reality of the issues of injustice in our global community". I agree with her nominee that we are fortunate to have Yezi's leadership and know her passion for equity and justice when moved beyond advocacy and into action will improve the lives of many, many people.

Presented by Mayor Kim Norton



Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020 Special Awards

Certificates of Commendation

in recognition of a lifetime of invaluable service and dedication to the residents of the City of Rochester.

Al Tuntland & Al DeBoer



Bob Nowicki



Jackie Trotter



Presented by Mayor Kim Norton

Mayor's Medal of Honor 2020 Special Awards

Above and Beyond

in recognition of their efforts during COVID.

Audrey Betcher & Rochester Public Library Staff



Presented by Mayor Kim Norton