

# Governor's Service Awards



August 4, 2021

Monona Terrace ~ Madison, WI



**AmeriCorps**  
Wisconsin



**AmeriCorps**  
Seniors

# PROGRAM

Welcome - Jeanne Duffy, Executive Director - Serve Wisconsin

Remarks - Governor Tony Evers

Awards Presentation - Christine Beatty, WNCSB Chair

**AmeriCorps Member of the Year**

Tre' Wafford - College Possible Milwaukee

**AmeriCorps Program of the Year**

DPI Farm to School

**AmeriCorps VISTA Member of the Year**

Colin Mackey - Habitat for Humanity of Wisconsin River Area

**AmeriCorps VISTA Program of the Year**

Wisconsin Association of Free and Charitable Clinics

**AmeriCorps Alumni of the Year**

Katherine Matisse - Teach For America Milwaukee

**AmeriCorps Seniors Volunteer of the Year**

Mildred "Dolly" McGeshick - Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council  
Senior Companions Program

**AmeriCorps Seniors Program of the Year**

Copper Lake/Lincoln Hills Foster Grandparent Program

**AmeriCorps Seniors Lifetime Impact Volunteer**

Betty Elsner - RSVP of Dane County, Inc

Sally Vyvyan - Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action  
Program Foster Grandparent Program

**Volunteer Coordinator of the Year**

Maryssa Paulsen - MCHS Volunteer WI

**COVID-19 Response Service Award**

Lisa Penterman - Be Well Fox Valley

Don Strube - RSVP Program of Portage County

Marshfield Clinic Health Systems—Volunteer Wisconsin

Silver Threads— RSVP Program of Portage County

Recognition of AmeriCorps Seniors Volunteers with 20+ years of service

Closing Remarks - Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes

*The Governor's Service Awards honors outstanding volunteers, national service participants, and programs that have helped to address serious social needs in their communities. These honorees have made significant contributions to Wisconsin through their service efforts. Their generous service is impacting the lives of countless Wisconsinites.*

# HONOREES

## Tre' Wafford

### *AmeriCorps Member of the Year*

With a strong drive to increase access to higher education and build up educational equity throughout Milwaukee, Tre' Wafford completed three terms of AmeriCorps service with College Possible Milwaukee.

During his first term, Tre' served as a Transition Coach at the College Possible Milwaukee Office, working with graduating seniors and college scholars over the spring and summer months to combat "summer melt," when students on track to enroll in college in the fall or continue their studies might drop-out over the summer. For his second term, he served as a high school coach working with students at Milwaukee High School for the Arts.



Over the last school year, Tre' worked with 33 aspiring college students at Casimir Pulaski High School to break down the barriers to enrolling in higher education. Tre' strove to form a strong relationship with his students and develop a deep understanding of their strengths. He strove to understand them within their unique cultural contexts as people of color and/or as recent immigrants and refugees. Tre' serves with intention and the awareness to change his approach when needed to help his students navigate the complex college application process. During his service he reflected that the goals he was setting for his students were too broad, so he adjusted to make their goals more detailed and scaffolded, modeling the steps for students to help them continue to progress independently when needed.

His dedication to his students went beyond the school day, as Tre' designed his schedule around his students' needs, making himself available to them on nights and weekends. When it came time for students to fill out their FAFSA applications, which includes sensitive financial information that many families closely guard, Tre' jumped at the chance to help his students and their families complete the forms in-person. Throughout this process, he worked with numerous students and families, including many that were not a part of his cohort, so that more students would have access to the financial resources necessary to enroll in college. His attentive, personalized approach yielded positive results. 84% of the students Tre' worked with intend to enroll in college, and 60% intend to enroll in a BA-granting institution, which is ten times the school average.

Throughout his service Tre' put particular focus on his students as individuals, including the way they learned and how he needed to mentor them individually to help them achieve their academic dreams. Tre' believes if he invests in his students as complex individuals with potential, the return will be compassionate thoughtful leaders ready to make the city of Milwaukee, the state of Wisconsin, and the entire country, a better place. Tre's service with College Possible truly cultivated future leaders who will without a doubt benefit from his support for years to come.

# Department of Public Instruction AmeriCorps Farm to School Program

## *AmeriCorps Program of the Year*

The Department of Public Instruction AmeriCorps Farm to School Program is dedicated to serving communities throughout the state by increasing access to fresh, healthy foods in schools and providing nutrition education to students. Their AmeriCorps members have impacted tens of thousands of students since the launch of the program in 2008 by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection. They have served nearly 75,000 hours since 2017 when the program transitioned to the Department of Public Instruction.

As part of their mission, the AmeriCorps members with Farm to School reach students in numerous ways, including leading lessons on nutrition, conducting tastings of locally raised/produced foods, working with students in school gardens, and connecting students with local farmers through classroom presentation or farm tours. When schools closed and moved to remote learning due to COVID-19, the Farm to School members found ways to continue reaching their students through virtual nutrition lessons, cooking demonstrations, and farm tours. Additionally, many continued maintaining the school gardens so that students would have items to harvest in the fall and provide home garden kits to their students to help connect them to their school gardens.

During the last school year, they continued to find ways to impact their students through a combination of in-person and virtual activities, collaborating with classroom teachers and finding innovative approaches to impact school meal programs by working with both school food service directors and local farmers. To help facilitate an increase in healthy local foods being served in school meal programs, Farm to School AmeriCorps members launched the Wisconsin Local Foods Database to connect more food service directors and farmers across the state. The groundwork for the database began in 2017 when AmeriCorps Farm to School member Megan Wise, while serving at Crawford County UW-Extension, created internal listings of farmers to ensure that future Farm to School members and school food service directors could maintain contact with local farmers. In the following years, the entire AmeriCorps Farm to School team managed the project as an internal tool, expanding its scope statewide. With both food service directors and farmers facing numerous challenges during the pandemic, the Farm to School members decided to create a public website for the database to help them connect with each other to get local foods into schools throughout the state. The creation of the Wisconsin Local Food Database is now helping alleviate the challenges for school food service directors by decreasing the time required to research and connect with local farmers. Additionally, it is assisting farmers whose local markets have been impacted by the pandemic to easily connect with school districts and make it possible for anyone in the general public to find healthy foods that these farmers can provide in their local area.

Through a combination of innovative service and dedicated efforts to impact student health and nutrition throughout Wisconsin, the Department of Public Instruction AmeriCorps Farm to School Program is supporting local communities and making a tangible difference for Wisconsin students, school staff, and farmers.



## **Colin Mackey**

### ***AmeriCorps VISTA Member of the Year***

Colin Mackey began serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA member at Habitat for Humanity of Wisconsin River Area last October to help low-income homeowners make repairs on their homes. As the Community Outreach Coordinator, he helped low-income homeowners in Columbia, Iowa and Sauk Counties, many of whom are members of vulnerable populations, veterans, senior citizens, and individuals with disabilities

Colin quickly launched into his service. Within weeks of his arrival, he conducted trainings for area Veterans Services Specialists and social workers to assist clients with the home repair program applications.

A quick learner, Colin identified funding opportunities and wrote grant applications and environmental reviews, which enabled Habitat to dramatically increase their home repair program budget of \$30,000 by securing \$114,000 in grant funding. He worked to obtain certification for Habitat as an Aging in Place Specialist through the National Association of Home Builders and registration as an approved VA Builder with the US Department of Veterans Affairs. These designations allowed them to provide more comprehensive services with access to additional grant funding.

His service helped Habitat dramatically increase the number of people it served. After just the first six months of his service, and despite the ongoing pandemic, Colin helped 30 families repair their homes, nearly doubling the 16 homeowners that had been served the entire previous year.

The impact of Colin's service did not stop at his local affiliate. He expanded his leadership to provide training for other Habitat for Humanity affiliates across the country to best serve their vulnerable populations. Colin led a national presentation at Habitat for Humanity International's annual spring conference alongside representatives from the Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America organizations. He then presented similar information to 54 affiliates in Michigan in June. These presentations centered around building relationships with local veterans organizations and informing them about potential funding options that were unfortunately often going unused.

Colin's AmeriCorps VISTA service has helped Habitat for Humanity of Wisconsin River Area and Habitat affiliates across the nation fulfill their mission to "build homes, communities, and hope." He quickly made a significant impact on those living in the local communities by expanding the ability for Habitat to provide needed home repairs. The knowledge he passed on through trainings and presentations, coupled with the grant funding he obtained, will have a lasting legacy for the citizens of Wisconsin and people throughout the country.



## Wisconsin Association of Free and Charitable Clinics *AmeriCorps VISTA Program of the Year*

The Wisconsin Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (WAFCC) AmeriCorps VISTA project makes a substantial impact on health of the people of our state. Their members serve 160,000 Wisconsin residents who lack adequate medical care and are uninsured or underinsured. Believing that everyone should have an opportunity to receive proper medical care no matter their situation, WAFCC VISTA members serve in numerous ways at over 20 clinics throughout the state.

Over the last year, WAFCC VISTA members obtained over \$600,000 in grants and in-kind support for donations. These funds have helped their clinics keep their doors open and provide care to their communities during this critical time. Additionally, by obtaining these medical donations and opportunities, clinics have expanded their dental programs, received immunization support, and provided additional services for underserved and uninsured Wisconsinites.

This impact gained even greater significance during the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years, as these vulnerable populations needed these clinics more than ever. The VISTA members with WAFCC stepped up their service in a time of desperation. Working to build the capacity of their clinics to serve the public, they rose to meet these needs with enthusiastic and innovative solutions. WAFCC VISTA members obtained over \$80,000 in COVID-19 aid for the clinics they served, including personal protective equipment, COVID-19 test kits, vaccine vouchers, and other needed elements. Their VISTA members have also been diligently working to provide education on COVID-19 at their sites and the communities they serve in multiple ways.

One of the key services that WAFCC VISTA members expanded was telemedicine. They obtained the resources necessary for telemedicine appointments to occur and helped staff at their site navigate and implement the technology. Due to these efforts, large numbers of patients were able to receive medical assistance during the pandemic that otherwise would not have been seen.

In addition to supporting the response to COVID-19 at their clinics, WAFCC VISTA members have worked to help their clinics refine their policies and procedures for the care they give their patients. As part of these efforts, nine of their VISTA members were instrumental in their clinics receiving the WAFCC Standards of Excellence Seal Award, which opens up many funding opportunities for their clinics and ensures that patients coming to these clinics receive the highest quality of care.

The Wisconsin Association of Free and Charitable Clinic VISTA project has fully embraced the VISTA mission of improving lives, combatting poverty, and strengthening the community through service. The commitment of WAFCC AmeriCorps VISTA members to connecting vulnerable populations in Wisconsin with the healthcare resources they need, has truly made a difference for others during the pandemic. The WAFCC VISTA members strengthened the ability of the clinics to rise above the challenges they faced due to the COVID-19 virus to provide quality health care to those in need.



## **Katherine Matisse** ***AmeriCorps Alumni of the Year***

Katherine Matisse grew up continuously advocating in and for her community. To Kat, educational activism meant dedicating her time and knowledge to underserved communities, urging students and teachers to regularly confront systems of oppression, and encourage her students to always ask “why?” With a firm commitment to promoting educational equity, Kat decided to serve as an AmeriCorps member for two years with Teach For America (TFA) Milwaukee, at Carmen Schools of Science and Technology - Northwest Campus. She believed that through her service she could help give her students the skills and understanding to empower them to advocate for themselves and to change what they believe to be wrong or unjust in the world. Following the completion of her AmeriCorps service, Katherine has not only continued making an impact for students at Carmen Northwest, but also has founded TwoBirds Tutoring, a nonprofit designed to provide employment opportunities to Milwaukee teens while simultaneously delivering high quality academic services to local elementary students.



When she joined TFA Milwaukee in 2018, she knew she needed to be a teacher because of previous positive experience teaching in summer camp and after-school arts programs, and through exploring her desire to teach through substitute classroom positions. While teaching 6th-8th grade interdisciplinary art and 6th grade literacy as an AmeriCorps member, Kat dedicated herself to developing relationships and building a sense of community among her students. She founded the Middle School Art Club and the Drama Club during her first year, directing the school's first play. Excitement built for the play during her second year, as even more students wanted to be involved and turnout was expected to double, but this was suddenly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though clubs and extra-curricular activities were canceled during those first months of distance learning, Kat worked with her students to innovate to allow the show to still go on. Kat purchased an animation program for one of her very ambitious students and the two of them spent countless hours animating the play, using recordings of the different students' parts as voiceovers, with the final production meaning an incredible amount to her students who were separated by distance learning and needed the positive experience.

Kat's service within the classroom also reached well beyond the call of duty during the pandemic. When some of her students began to fall behind and struggled to complete assignments on time, she formed an open-door policy through Facetime. Students were able to call her whenever they needed for homework help, mentoring, questions, or wellness check-ins. She soon had a small group of students regularly calling for group homework hours, who as soon as it was safe planned weekend outdoor outings with Kat to spend time with one another and enjoy time with their new mentor.

Kat's commitment to the students of Milwaukee did not end when her AmeriCorps service concluded, nor did it stop at the schoolhouse door. While driving a former student home from an interview at a local McDonald's, she and the student spoke about how find a job with good pay that would also get them ready for their desired future in social work. Their discussion centered around how her older former students needed career opportunities and job skills to make this possible, but her current students needed academic support. On that drive home, Kat realized she could solve these two problems with one solution; two birds, perched on one stone. Founded just last year, the TwoBirds mission is to provide well-paying and intentional job opportunities for teens in Milwaukee to serve as tutors for their younger peers at no cost to families.

Kat's career as an educator and as the executive director of TwoBirds Tutoring are still in their early stages, but the foundation she created through her AmeriCorps service has already made a significant impact in the lives of numerous students and will only continue to make a difference for many more.

## Mildred “Dolly” McGeshick

### *AmeriCorps Seniors Volunteer of the Year*

Mildred “Dolly” McGeshick has dedicated her life to helping others and continues to make a difference to the people of Wisconsin through her AmeriCorps Seniors service with the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council Senior Companions Program and the care that she consistently shows for those within the local tribal communities.

Dolly began showing this commitment to others at a young age. Despite loving school and being a strong student, Dolly stayed home from school after her mother left in order to take care of her younger brothers and sisters. Dolly instead would complete schoolwork that was sent home to her. When later caring for three of her uncles, she drove them to Elder Association meetings at different tribal locations each month, and although she was too young to attend the meetings, she was allowed to stay to assist her uncles. Her involvement grew, and she was ultimately voted to the board in 1966 of what is today the Great Lakes Native American Elders Association. Feeling it is her duty to care for other people, she expanded the scope of this commitment, traveling to Washington, DC to advocate for Native American causes, becoming the first Indian Child Welfare worker in the country, and assisting with the development of the Indian Child Welfare Act. She has had a significant impact on numerous people, from the 69 children she has helped raise from both her own Mole Lake Sokaogon Ojibway tribe and others, to all of those impacted by her advocacy and efforts.



Dolly’s impact through AmeriCorps Seniors began before she was eligible to start serving with the program itself. Dolly wrote the first grant for the Foster Grandparent Program, serving children from Wisconsin tribes in Northern Wisconsin. Today, this program is also administered by the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council (GLITC). Dolly became an official volunteer with the GLITC Senior Companions Program (SCP) in 2015 and has since served over 6,000 hours and counting. Through her service, she has helped tribal elders in her community by offering friendship, companionship, running errands, doing chores, and giving rides. She has not just enhanced the life of these individuals, but she has also been a major asset to GLITC’s program as a go-to person when questions need answering or phone calls and other connections need to be made.

A key example of the impact she has had through her service comes from the companionship she provided to a tribal elder with multiple co-morbidities and lack of community and family support during the COVID-19 pandemic. This elder from the Lac Du Flambeau Lake Superior Ojibway tribe had kidney disease and was given an intense dialysis schedule. The elder was both nervous and sad at the prospect of sitting alone several times per week for hours at a time at the dialysis center during her treatment. When the GLITC-SCP could not find someone in her tribal community willing to be her companion as she went through these treatments, Dolly volunteered to be the Senior Companion to sit with the elder and console her during her treatment, even though she came from another tribe and lived about an hour and half away. With a gentle approach, Dolly was able to help the very emotional elder agree to begin her dialysis treatment. With a good sense of humor and a positive attitude, Dolly helped the elder become noticeably calmer throughout her treatment as they bonded through conversation, telling stories, and sharing memories.

Reflecting on her desire to help those in her community, she explains that “when I get food, I feed others.” Throughout her life and through her AmeriCorps Seniors service, Dolly has made a true impact for tribal communities that has sustained and bettered the life of countless individuals.



# Copper Lake/Lincoln Hills Foster Grandparent Program

## AmeriCorps Seniors Program of the Year

The Copper Lake / Lincoln Hills Foster Grandparent Program is one of the longest operating AmeriCorps Seniors programs in the state. As they first started serving youth at the Copper Lake School in 1973. Unlike the other Foster Grandparent Programs in the state that operate at typical K-12 schools, what makes their program unique is that their volunteers serve at the two schools within the only Type 1 Correctional Facility for youth in the State of Wisconsin. Their Foster Grandparents volunteer in the living units, school classrooms, and/or their reading buddy program, striving to bring a spirit of love and care to the young people within these facilities.

The volunteers take on numerous roles as part of their service, tutoring the youth in multiple subjects in the classroom and acting as a mentor that can provide them with needed attention. They engage the youth in activities ranging from playing cards and other games, baking treats together to share, doing crafts and outdoor planting, to simply talking and serving as a willing ear that will not judge or give up on them. The Foster Grandparents have an amazing ability to communicate with the youth and form connections in ways that facility staff often cannot. The youth know that they are volunteers who do not have to be there and yet commit to coming there solely because of their caring spirit. They also provide an additional sense of consistency for youth through their long-term commitment to service as volunteers at facilities that have a high turnover rate for employees.

To continue providing this caring presence for the youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, the program worked with the Department of Corrections. After initial efforts to transition to virtual mentoring, the Foster Grandparents were fortunately able to return to serving in-person following the availability of the COVID-19 vaccines. With concerns for their safety due to the environment within the facility being seen as more hostile than before the pandemic, the volunteers met with their program supervisor to discuss changes to the institution's climate to see if they still wanted to return. Without hesitation, the Foster Grandparents expressed their willingness to return and they were confident everything would be fine. It took time for the volunteers to build up a rapport for the youth after returning, as roughly 95% of the youth had not been at the facility prior to the pandemic and did not know what to think of these incoming Foster Grandparents. By the end of the second week, the youth began to open up to the volunteers and the environment began shifting around them. When the Foster Grandparents held a day in the gym with the youth to help the school on a teacher in-service day, facility staff reported it being a whole new world. While engaging with the volunteers in games and craft activities, the day showcased an overall atmosphere of respect without arguments or prior concerns. The youth took the initiative to pick up beanbags for the grandmas they were playing cornhole with so they would not have to bend over. With the growing impact of their service becoming apparent following their return, the superintendent and the educational director for the schools have even reached out to see if the Foster Grandparents can be there for more days and later hours to expand the difference they are making.

Across the 48 years that the Copper Lake / Lincoln Hills Foster Grandparent Program has been in operation, they have continued to show up and made a difference in the lives of youth within a challenging environment. They have had an invaluable impact for the young people within these facilities, offering them far more than just educational assistance, but serving as caring mentors that demonstrate a willingness to invest their time and heartfelt attention to provide connections for these youth.



Grandma Robin



Grandma Joan



Grandma Nona



Grandma Jessie



Grandma Jeannith



Grandma Marg



Grandpa Ed



Grandma Audrey



Grandma Pat



Grandpa Jerry



Grandpa Phil

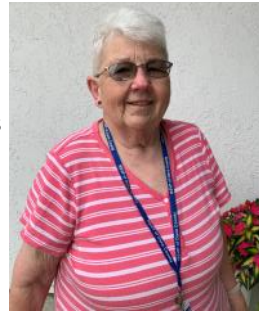


Grandma Joan

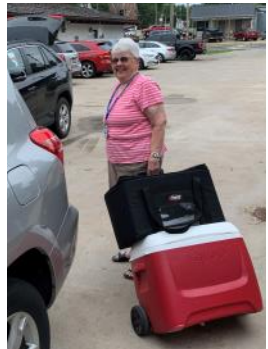
## Betty Elsner

### *AmeriCorps Seniors Lifetime Impact Volunteer*

Betty Elsner has made a remarkable difference for the people of Wisconsin over four decades of service with RSVP of Dane County. Betty initially responded to their call for volunteers in September 1978 when RSVP of Dane County first launched their service to deliver meals to older adults. She made her volunteer deliveries a priority, always fitting her service into her work schedule. She not only continued her deliveries after her retirement, but she expanded her service by joining the kitchen crew at the Stoughton Area Senior Center, helping to put the meals together before delivering her regular route. In her over 42 years of service, she has delivered an estimated 38,000 meals to seniors who depend on these meals to be able to live independently.



Betty realized early on during her volunteering that she was often the only person that the seniors she delivered meals to would see that day. To provide additional opportunities for these seniors, she would occasionally draft her teenage son to help deliver meals with her, as her home delivered meal clients always enjoyed having young visitors. The seniors that receive these meals not only depend on them to live where they wish and to eat healthier foods, but they also report that the RSVP volunteer that delivers their meal gives them someone to talk to, a sense of safety, and a link to get more support. Through her service, Betty has brought a friendly reassurance to some of the most isolated and vulnerable community members that someone cares for them.



Betty has gone to great lengths to always be there for these older adults, not even letting broken bones stop her service. After hurting her wrist at work late one Sunday night, she did not think there was enough time to get a substitute volunteer driver for her Monday morning home-delivered meal shift. Wanting to ensure these meals would still be received, her husband drove her to all of the homes on her schedule and she still delivered the meals. Only afterwards did she see a doctor, finding out that her wrist was broken. Betty never considered canceling because she knew that the home delivered meal recipients depended on her.

When the senior center had to stop using older adult volunteers to deliver meals for several months due to COVID-19 last spring, she said that not being able to provide her AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer service “almost did her in” and that she was incredibly happy when she could deliver meals again. After returning to service, she was able to help the Stoughton Area Senior Center reach seniors that were now even more in need of these meal deliveries due to the pandemic, as their volunteer team ultimately delivered over 10,000 meals in Stoughton in 2020.

Betty Elsner is a vital member of the RSVP of Dane County volunteer team and a big reason that the meal recipients have a positive experience. She is their longest serving volunteer and the longest actively serving AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer in Wisconsin. Throughout the last 42 years and still now every Monday, Betty has not just packed up and delivered meals, she has delivered companionship and healthier and happier futures for older adults in need.

## Sally Vyvyan

### *AmeriCorps Seniors Lifetime Impact Volunteer*

When asked at Westby Elementary “How do you spell awe-inspiring,” a likely response is that it is spelled S-A-L-L-Y for Grandma Sally. For nearly two decades, Sally Vyvyan has positively impacted students and classrooms at Westby Elementary as an AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer with the Foster Grandparents Program that is currently operated by the Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program.

Sally has made a significant impact for Westby students since 2002, providing at least 15,000 hours of service to make a difference in their education. Sally typically volunteers 20 hours or more per week during the school year. Her commitment to her students continues after leaving school for the day, as you can often find Sally at the town library researching the challenges children face and how they might impact their ability to learn. She strives to apply the knowledge to best serve her students, saying her greatest joy is seeing how the children she works with progress from her help.

Sally works with almost every classroom through the 3rd grade at the school and she typically has between 10-15 specific students each year. The difference she makes for her students is tangible. Her students have had a success rate of over 90% in achieving the goals set by the school since 2017. While she has certain students assigned to her each year, the teachers at Westby note that all of the students benefit from her as a positive role model and through the encouragement she brings as she helps students with academics and social and life skills.

One example of these efforts comes from the Book Club that she created for students with a wide range of reading levels to help better prepare students for reading and help them see viewpoints from several different perspectives. More than just reading the books, Grandma Sally’s book club researches the book they read, the origin of stories, and the author. Participating in the Book Club has brought greater enjoyment of reading to her reluctant readers, and she hopes it will help students fall in love with reading.

This is not the only lasting impact she has on these students, even though the first students she worked with graduated several years ago. The connections she made have continued through high school and even being invited to some of their weddings. Sally said that “for me to be thought about after they graduate high school and to see what they have become and do with their lives is touching.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down in-person learning and prevented her from working with her students, she looked forward to the chance to return to the classroom. Following the availability of COVID-19 vaccines, Sally quickly jumped at the opportunity receiving it would provide, and ultimately became the first Southwest CAP volunteer in her program to return to school. It turned out that she was not the only one eagerly awaiting her return, as she found a giant “Welcome Back Grandma Sally” sign made by the students when entering the school and was then greeted by every student and staff member lining the hallways clapping to welcome her back.

When reflecting upon her service and honors she has received, including the Presidential Award in 2012 for 10,000 hours of service, Sally describes being grateful for these, but that “there is no award greater than a child’s smile, hug, or respect.” Over her nearly two decades of service, she has received hundreds upon hundreds of these, while make a lasting difference for the students at Westby Elementary School.



## Maryssa Paulsen

### *Volunteer Coordinator of the Year*

Maryssa Paulsen was motivated to serve at New Leaf Foods, Inc. through Marshfield Clinic Health Systems AmeriCorps Volunteer Wisconsin due to her personal understanding of the importance that access to healthy food has in Wisconsin communities. Having experienced inconsistent access to healthy food and the need for food assistance while growing up in rural Wisconsin, Maryssa joined AmeriCorps to help increase access to healthy food for everyone in the Greater Green Bay area and strengthen local food systems throughout Northeastern Wisconsin.



Maryssa is a volunteer coordinator powerhouse for New Leaf Foods, recruiting highly effective volunteers after streamlining their volunteer recruitment procedures and putting inclusive excellence at the heart of their volunteer practices. Additionally, she helped increase their organizational capacity by helping to develop their strategic planning for internal and external communication and refining their collaborative partnership processes and outreach functions. As part of these efforts, she outlined specific volunteer positions for communications and added a blog to their website, including seeking out contributors. Her efforts have helped New Leaf Food continue growing towards becoming a Local Food Communication Hub for Green Bay regional consumers that serves as a place to turn to for trusted information about healthy local food.

As the volunteer coordinator for Garden Blitz, one of New Leaf's most volunteer-intensive efforts that requires in-person volunteers, she helped revise and implement a plan allowing this program to continue during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program had already installed almost 800 raised bed garden boxes to assist low-income, diverse population neighborhoods throughout the Green Bay area since 2014 and it was highly dependent on its volunteers to continue operating. The procedures she developed created preparations and precautions that would allow volunteers to serve safely. Additionally, wanting to permanently increase the capacity of the program, Maryssa formalized volunteer position descriptions and training manuals, strengthened partnerships with various community organizations that encourage their members to volunteers as teams, and refined their recruitment procedures with the Green Bay Volunteer Center.

Maryssa also served as the Outreach Coordinator for NEW Food Forum, an initiative to develop sustainable local food systems to expand access to healthy foods. Maryssa was tasked with identifying local food stakeholders throughout the food production, shipping, and consumption spectrum and encouraging them to become involved in the development of healthy local food systems. She brought her experience from her degree in Environmental Policy & Planning to research and evaluate national and international models of local food system planning and policy and to help New Leaf Foods apply them to the development of the NEW Food Forum.

Maryssa increased New Leaf Food Inc's organizational capacity by streamlining volunteer recruitment procedures, improving communication, and improving collaborative partnership processes and outreach functions. Her service has enabled them to better promote healthy food access and develop healthy local food systems. Her contributions will be felt for years to come in the health of the residents of the Greater Green Bay area

## Lisa Penterman

### **COVID-19 Response Service Award—Individual**

Lisa Penterman was motivated to serve at Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin through the Be Well Fox Valley AmeriCorps program because she wanted to provide others with self-sufficiency. According to Lisa, “any day I can help someone in need is a good day.” When the needs in communities throughout the state grew dramatically following the spread of COVID-19, she responded to help address the increase in food insecurity caused by the pandemic. Lisa took on numerous efforts to help Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin assist over 600,000 Wisconsin residents throughout the 35 counties they serve.

To help food pantry clients safely receive food during the pandemic, Lisa coordinated drive-thru mobile food pantries, primarily in Brown, Calumet, Fond du Lac, Outagamie, Shawano, Waupaca, and Winnebago counties. Lisa typically helped with at least three to six of these mobile pantries a week, supporting and coordinating volunteers, performing traffic control, providing FoodShare information to participants, and putting food boxes into the participants' vehicles. Additionally, as food pantries experienced unprecedented community need and a drastic demand in food, Lisa stepped up to review order forms to ensure pantries were ordering the correct amount of food. She provided this support for each of the pantries they served, helping to eliminate errors and making sure needed food was not wasted or misdirected.

Lisa also strove to combat food insecurity through substantial efforts to provide outreach and education on FoodShare to community members, organizations, and food pantries. These efforts included connecting with over 300 community assistance organizations and all 160 pantries within their service area, passing out fliers, and talking to individuals during mobile food pantries. Wanting to reach more people, she innovated to share information on FoodShare at locations people were still frequenting, including grocery stores, gas stations, laundromats, and libraries. Lisa conducted outreach and she also provided technical assistance to community members applying for FoodShare benefits through Consortium calls that connect individuals with agencies that can assist them, helping 152 clients apply for FoodShare benefits that totaled 89,528 meals.

Lisa's site supervisor Cassie Faulks shared, “Working in a food bank, you need to be able to adapt to change quickly and in a positive manner. Lisa exhibits these skills daily. Each day brings its own set of challenges, and Lisa faces them head-on. She maintains a positive attitude and it brings up those around her and influences them to act in the same way. Whether it be FoodShare outreach or mobile food pantries, she is always thinking about ways to improve.”

The diligence, passion, and innovation that Lisa Penterman brought to her service, helped thousands of food insecure individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Patti Habeck, CEO and President of Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin shared that when demand had dramatically increased and many of those being served had never navigated the hunger relief system in the past, “Lisa learned quickly how to do FoodShare outreach, and became an integral part of the outreach staff. Her patience, empathy, and compassion helped people feel more comfortable during very difficult times. I am quite certain we wouldn't have been able to achieve the level of service we provided during the pandemic without Lisa's help.”



## Don Strube

### *COVID-19 Response Service Award*

Throughout his life, Don Strube has taken the advice of his father that "If you quit moving, you quit moving" to heart. This dedication to keep going throughout challenges has made a significant difference for older adults in Portage County, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Since a young age, Don has been serving others, enlisting and serving in the Marine Corps for four years. After his service he became a deputy sheriff with the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office, and then a corrections officer until his retirement. Not one to quit moving, Don started volunteering with the Meals on Wheels program in Stevens Point as a substitute driver, before being referred to the Portage County Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) due to his desire to drive more and have a larger impact. For the past eleven years, Don has been a volunteer driver, providing free transportation to older adults who cannot drive to get to medical appointments and other essential business. His service has been crucial to many Portage County seniors, particularly since public transportation is only available in Stevens Point, leaving older residents in rural areas in need of dependable and affordable transportation options to obtain necessary services. He was always willing to take any trip requested regardless of the distance. When combined with the compassionate ear he offered to those he drove through their conversations, it is no surprise that he was one of their most frequently requested drivers.

When the COVID-19 pandemic started spreading, Don's rides became more important than ever. Despite being in the "high-risk" older adult population, Don was one of only a handful of volunteer drivers who continued to serve during the pandemic. He diligently followed all CDC guidelines and program protocols to ensure that he and his riders remained as safe as possible during a very challenging time, with everyone wearing masks, adhering to social distancing as much as possible, and Don sanitizing his vehicle after each ride. By carefully following these practices, Don's riders knew that they could depend on him during their times of need. Additionally, this has allowed him to consistently and safely provide rides throughout the pandemic, as neither he nor any of his riders have contracted COVID-19 from one another.

Over the course of his over eleven years as an RSVP driver, Don has driven 102,547 miles and clocked more than 7,600 hours. As one of the only volunteer drivers still serving after the start of the pandemic, Don drove 24,638 miles while providing 324 trips just during the period from March 2020 through May 2021 alone.

The value of his service is much larger than the numbers on his odometer, as it is truly seen in his impact on the people he transports. One of Don's regular riders is an 80-year-old woman with significant medical challenges. Don's rides allow her to get to her medical appointments without feeling like she is a burden on her relatives, the closest of which lives 50 miles from her. She is certainly not a burden on Don, who she specifically requests when scheduling trips. He shared, "I don't consider them my riders, they're my friends."

Whenever he is driving for RSVP, Don does not just provide a ride to medical appointments or to obtain needed goods and services, he provides social interaction for his riders and a willing listening ear. This was especially important during the pandemic and the growing concerns of social isolation and loneliness it caused, particularly for senior citizens. For many of his passengers, Don was one of the very few people they spoke to face to face for more than a year. Don gave independence and peace of mind to his riders and their families, continuing to answer the call to service, even during one of the most difficult periods in our lifetimes.

# Marshfield Clinic Health Systems Volunteer Wisconsin *COVID-19 Response Service Award*

Marshfield Clinic Health Systems AmeriCorps Volunteer Wisconsin aims to strengthen communities by increasing the capacity of nonprofit organizations to serve the public by improving how they recruit, manage, and engage volunteers. Since the program's creation in 2014, their 227 AmeriCorps members have provided 92 nonprofits with the tools they need to grow and strengthen the impact of their volunteers, with the 13,142 new volunteers they recruited giving 147,499 hours of service to their communities.

Effectively coordinating volunteers can dramatically impact the services a nonprofit organization can provide, and it became even more critical for organizations and communities following the spread of COVID-19 throughout the state. The pandemic caused a rapid shift in the service done by most of their AmeriCorps members, as many of their host site organizations paused traditional volunteer projects for an indeterminate time. With the widespread switch to remote operations during the first few months of the pandemic, many members became the tech experts at their service sites, helping them adopt new virtual platforms, and training their staff to be comfortable using the new tech. Members quickly responded by creating newsletters, sending check-in messages, and organizing virtual events so volunteers could still interact and feel connected as the new roles were forged. Building upon the knowledge they gained, they created new, impactful volunteer positions that did not require face-to-face contact but still allowed people to serve their communities. To make this possible, they developed virtual orientations and trainings. These modules were vital for their host sites during the pandemic and are continuing to be incredibly useful in training volunteers following the resumption of in-person activities.

While many Volunteer Wisconsin AmeriCorps members had to help their organizations navigate these pauses in services, others had to make it possible for their host sites to dramatically increase services in response to the pandemic. Those serving with food pantries and community centers had to help develop modified distribution processes so both clients receiving items and the nonprofit staff and volunteers were safe. Additionally, Wisconsin 211 experienced a massive increase in call volume due to an expanded need for accurate information on COVID-19 conditions, testing availability, and referrals to assistance services due to the pandemic. In response, their Volunteer Wisconsin member assumed responsibility for training and managing new cohorts of volunteers to answer calls on a newly created COVID-19 helpline, which enabled the 211 staff to focus on the increased call volume regarding their traditional assistance referrals.

Lastly, many Volunteer Wisconsin members received permission from their supervisors to engage in alternate service activities that directly responded to COVID-19 needs in their communities and throughout the state, providing over 5,000 hours of alternative COVID relief service. Several began answering calls for Wisconsin 211, joining AmeriCorps members from other programs throughout the state to operate its new COVID-19 helpline. Additionally, they held food drives for veterans, provided childcare for medical professionals, fed the homeless when volunteers were scarce, created digital and distanced recognitions for graduating high school seniors without in-person ceremonies, and found ways to help those in need in many other ways.

Despite the myriad of challenges they faced coordinating volunteers during the pandemic, Volunteer Wisconsin had long-lasting impacts for the nonprofits they assisted and the community as a whole. They not only organized volunteers to deliver critical services and assistance to people impacted by the pandemic, but they stepped up themselves to take on additional service activities to help their communities respond to growing needs across the state.



## Silver Threads

### *COVID-19 Response Service Awards—Organization*

For more than 20 years, Silver Threads has been one of the signature programs of the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Portage County. Silver Threads volunteers use their sewing skills to craft items that are donated to individuals and nonprofit organizations in the Portage community. They create items needed in the community, including quilts and blankets, bibs and burp cloths, wheelchair and walker bags, hot pads, chemo hats, mittens, and a wide range of other items.

When COVID-19 started spreading, despite being unable to meet to collaborate and complete their projects, the Silver Threads volunteers quickly communicated to take on new projects responding to the pandemic from home. With the need for cloth face masks becoming an immediate need, they jumped into action to provide masks. Rising to the occasion, Silver Threads produced 3,500 cloth masks that were distributed by RSVP staff and volunteers to hospitals, food pantries, hospice organizations, long term care and assisted living facilities, medical personnel, and others. Many also assisted other local organizations to help them make and provide masks that were handed out at bank drive-thru services, food banks, and essential volunteer-based organizations.

The Silver Threads volunteers adapted to the pandemic, continuing to take on the vast majority of the costs of their projects in order to keep serving the community, ordering supplies online and using stockpiles of their own fabric. RSVP staff also arranged to drop off additional supplies to their doorsteps, allowing them to continue to sew their projects and for completed items to be delivered. In addition to masks, the group also addressed the needs of the children and families at the Family Crisis Center by giving each a quilt, warm fleece mittens, and tote bags to carry their belongings. Hospice organizations were provided catheter bag covers to help preserve their patients' dignity, as well as making quilts, blankets and chemo hats to keep those they served warm and comforted. Never ones to allow things to go to waste, the Silver Threads volunteers also kept their fabric trimmings and scraps to use as filing for dog beds, which were donated to the Humane Society to go home with newly adopted pets.

One special project was organized around the local "Spirit of 45" event that had been planned for August 2020 in Portage County to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII. Due to the pandemic, the event had to be cancelled, but the Silver Threads volunteers worked diligently to make sure that local veterans would still be honored. They created quilts that were delivered to every known WWII veteran, as well as for several Korean and Vietnam war veterans. The response from the veterans and their families at this special recognition included an outpouring of thanks for the creation of these detailed Veterans Quilts of Appreciation.

Silver Threads is a hallmark example of using one's talents and passion for serving others. The members of Silver Threads love what they do, and their efforts have helped the Portage County community for more than two decades. Their passion has not stopped for anything, not even a global pandemic. Despite the obstacles they faced, their 19 volunteers reported 4,300 hours of service over the past year. Through their hard work, they created 4,200 items valued at \$44,000, which were donated to community members and non-profit organizations. They responded to make a difference for their community, stepping up to provide masks to keep their community members safe and to create a wide range of items to fulfill community needs.





## **AmeriCorps Seniors Volunteers who have given 20 or more years of volunteer service**

*To recognize volunteers that have made an impact for the people of Wisconsin over multiple decades through their dedicated service, we are honoring all of the AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers throughout the state that have given 20 or more years of volunteer service with their programs.*

*There are currently 221 individuals across Wisconsin that have provided this invaluable service, who are listed below by their programs. In future years, we will be honoring AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers after the completion of their 20th year of volunteer service.*

### **ADVOCAP RSVP**

Paul Reiden  
Janet VanLankVelt

### **CESA 10 Foster Grandparents Program**

Kathleen Margraf  
Barbara Robinson  
Mildred Schweinler  
Lorraine Schluter

### **Northwest Wisconsin Community Services Agency RSVP**

Virgina Benninghoff  
Reino Hill  
Mary D Hudson  
Jeanne Hultman  
Rita Kovach  
Sharon Manthei  
Doris Morello  
Donna Roguski  
Ruth Smith  
June Steel  
Patricia Summerfield  
Mary A. Sveda  
Shirely Thoen  
Jean Vandevoorde

### **RSVP of Brown County**

Barbara Beaver  
Dorothy Perpich  
Yvonne Ward

### **RSVP of Coulee Region**

Betty Baier  
Pat Blanchard  
Sister Fran Browning  
Patricia Forer  
Betty Fukuda  
Gerrie Gerke  
Evelyn Hammes  
Mary Hanson  
Velma Lutz  
Carol Parker  
Dorothy Paulikas  
Marilyn Pertzsch  
Charlotte Phelps  
George Renner  
Dorothy Ricke  
Winnie Solberg

### **RSVP of Dane County**

Barbara Arntz  
Bill J. Arthur  
Melvern L. Bankes  
James W. Benes  
Joanne Berschet  
Valerie Birrenkott  
Dorothy Blotz  
Walter Brinkmann  
Barbara L. Bristol  
Paul L. Brown  
Marge Bucholz  
Ruth Conrad  
Lynne S. Diebel  
Kathryn Disch  
Marian Drake

Irene Draper  
Mary Lee Eaton  
Mary Eichelkraut  
Betty Elsner  
Jeannette M. Erickson  
Karen J. Foy  
George E. Fuller  
Grant Gelhar  
Marlene Gerner  
Dorothy I. Handrick  
Caroll Heiderman  
Robert W. Hoffman  
Marcia C. Holman  
Lee Ihlenfeldt  
Berneice Jelle  
Margaret Jensen  
Everett E. Johnson  
Phyllis J. Johnson  
Gary W. Karl  
Dorothy Karls  
Janet J. Knutson  
Doris Koster  
Terry L. Kringle  
Frederick Kruger  
Ethel Lamboley  
Adolph E. Leueberger  
Saul Levin  
Francis C. Long  
Virginia A. Lunde  
Julie Madden  
Louise Maier  
Charlotte Marshall  
Jim D. Meyer  
Margaret E. Meyer  
Wayne G. Meyer  
Robert Moe  
Sharon M. Mogensen  
Nancy Nesheim  
Marie Oakeson  
Peter Orlik  
Pat Osborn  
Shirley Outerbridge  
Sharon A. Owen  
Barbara Palmer  
Suzanne Penfield

Helen Pertzborn  
Kenneth J. Pippert  
Georgia Post  
Elizabeth Rewey  
David Rice  
Rob Rodini  
Charles Rose  
Dick Royston  
Roberta L. Ruder  
Harold Sabot  
Joan Schneeberger  
Kay L. Schoonmaker  
Florence Smith  
Susan Sorrentino  
Mary Stamstad  
Henrietta Statz  
Dawn E. Stucki  
Robert F. Syvrud  
Judy Tegtman  
Bill Thiede  
Jeanne Topel  
Robert Topel  
Lois B. Tyler  
Roger D. Utermark  
Charlotte Viney  
Delories Vosen  
Evelyn Wagner  
Bruce Whiting  
Colleen Winckensten  
Doris Zweifel

#### **RSVP of Kenosha County**

Jerry Anderson  
Jerome Clements  
William Colombe  
Minnie Cox-Laudonio  
Eleanor Gapko  
Catherine Higgins  
John Hoffman  
Dorothy Jansen  
Carol Knight  
Betty Schlater  
Maxine Silvius  
Marilyn Strangberg

### **RSVP of Outagamie County**

Gail Gertsch  
Cathy Glasheen  
Anne Kidd  
Mary McClure  
Mary Ann Van Leur  
Norma Will

### **RSVP of Portage County**

Holly Ballenger  
Ed Bancker  
Pat Bohanski  
Mari Buzza  
Janice Catlin  
Angie Dereziński  
Bernie Domaszek  
Ruth Duda  
Claire Feigelson  
Julie Firkus  
Joyce Gilligan  
Carol Grasamkee  
Helen Hetchler  
Pat Hilpert  
Jean Iverson  
Liz Kammer  
Ramona Kizewski  
Marge Krogwold  
Jeanette Osowski  
Marilyn Pederson  
Carolyn Potocki  
Ray Potocki  
Sally Rice  
Mary Ann Sankey  
Judy Smith  
Julitta Szczepanski  
Marcy Trzinski  
Marilyn Worth  
Marge Zaske

### **RSVP of Racine County**

Shirley Chmielewski  
Evelyn Lajiness  
Ellen Martino  
Barbara Rigden  
Jackie Romeril  
Lawrence Terry

### **RSVP of Rock County**

Betty Ainger  
Jane Clift  
Larry Clift  
Lois Ferrera  
Delores Folyer  
Yoshiko Glos  
Joyce Gray  
Carol Hurley  
Naomi Hackbarth  
Shirley Jeffers  
Judith Lechelt  
Dolores Leonard  
Virginia Nitz  
Norma Olin  
Joann Petersons  
Eva Pickett  
Phil Pickett  
Alfred Pinnow  
Beth Schmuck  
Fung Scholz  
Karen Starling  
Marcia Stenberg  
Marge Terneus  
Dorothy Warriner  
Gene Wenham  
Laurena Wise

### **RSVP of Waukesha County**

Margaret Brandenburg  
Ted Dahl  
Bill Gay  
Cecelia Gump  
Roy Gump  
Janice Hector  
Dick Klingbeil  
Patricia Knuth  
Rosemary Loesche  
Yvonne McCormick  
Nancy Schmidt  
Kathleen Urban  
Dolores Wuttke

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**Serve Wisconsin** is Wisconsin's National and Community Service Board. Our mission is to promote service, provide training, and allocate resources to programs that enrich lives and communities through service and volunteerism.



We achieve this mission primarily through our work with AmeriCorps programs and AmeriCorps members throughout the state of Wisconsin. We are governed by a 21-member citizen board appointed by Governor Evers. For more information about Serve Wisconsin or funded AmeriCorps programs, visit [www.servewisconsin.wi.gov](http://www.servewisconsin.wi.gov).

**AmeriCorps**, a federal agency, brings people together to tackle the country's most pressing challenges through national service and volunteering. AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers serve with organizations dedicated to the improvement of communities. AmeriCorps helps make service to others a cornerstone of our national culture. Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](http://AmeriCorps.gov).



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## CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL HONOREES

Serve Wisconsin would like to congratulate the 2021 Governor's Service Awards Honorees. Thank you for your dedication to improving Wisconsin communities through service!