

# AARP: Rhinelander man wins AARP Wisconsin's top volunteer award

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**MADISON, WISCONSIN** – Rhinelander resident Bill Vancos will be presented with AARP Wisconsin's highest and most prestigious honor – the “2019 Andrus Award for Community Service” – on Thursday, Oct. 17, during a brief ceremony at the Rhinelander Area Food Pantry beginning at 11 a.m.

“This award honors Bill's tireless commitment to making life better for others,” said AARP Wisconsin State Director Sam Wilson. “Through his volunteer service for the AARP Tax-Aide program, the Rhinelander Area Food Pantry and the Rhinelander Historical Society, Bill has built up the trust, influence and respect it takes to accomplish great things in his community. He's an inspiration to us all.”

Vancos, 69, is a lifelong resident of Rhinelander, leaving only to earn Bachelor of Science degrees with majors in Economics and Business Administration at UW-Stevens Point. He also has Associate's Degrees in accounting and office management from Nicolet Area Technical College in Rhinelander.

He retired nine years ago from his job as human resources manager at the Wausau Paper Company's Rhinelander mill, which has since changed its name. He and his wife, Joy, who passed away four years ago, have one son, Jonathan, and one grandchild.

For the past six years Vancos has served as the local coordinator for the AARP Tax-Aide program, which operates out of the Oneida County Aging and Disability Resource Center in Rhinelander. He worked as a tax counselor for a few years prior

to becoming coordinator.

Vancos said he is appreciative of the award. He is reluctant to shine the spotlight on himself, but agreed to be interviewed if this award can help provide more publicity for the local organizations he serves, such as the food pantry, museum, and Tax-Aide program.

“I’m humbled and honored to think that I was selected from what must have been a large number of very deserving candidates,” he said.

As part of his award, Bill was given the opportunity to select an organization to receive a \$1,000 donation from AARP. He has chosen to give the money to the Rhinelander Area Food Pantry, where he volunteers as publicity coordinator and operations committee member.

Vancos is also president of the Rhinelander Historical Society, where Joy was a historian for years. He coordinates docents, oversees museum building repairs and upkeep, organizes spring and fall cleanups, lends a hand whenever and wherever necessary, and enthusiastically continues much of the work that Joy had started.

“With Bill’s gusto we have revitalized many of the original events at the museum,” including an ice cream social, a violin concert, and open houses during the Halloween and Christmas seasons, said Nancy Brissee, a friend and colleague who nominated Bill for the award.

As for his work with Tax-Aide, Brissee said Bill’s steady encouragement of counselors, respect and consideration for all clients, and attention to details serves as an inspiration to others. “The sheer fact of Bill’s involvement in so many meaningful volunteer activities is inspiring. His dedication to the many organizations he supports is truly admirable,” she said.

Vancos is also the current chairman of the Northwoods Tobacco-Free Coalition, providing advocacy and helping to improve the health of those in the community.

“Right now we’re very focused on protecting children from the harmful effects of vaping other tobacco products.”

He also volunteers time to the “Let’s Go Fishing Hodag Chapter,” which is an organization that takes socially isolated residents out for boat rides and fishing trips to help brighten their lives.

Recipients of the Andrus Award (named after AARP founder Ethel Percy Andrus) in each state across the nation are chosen for their ability to enhance the lives of AARP members and prospective members, improve the community in which the work was performed, and inspire others to volunteer.

“Bill clearly goes above and beyond the definition of volunteer, and serves as an inspiring example of the phrase ‘service before self,’” Wilson said. “He is committed to doing whatever he can to make life better for those around him and all of us as we age. He is truly one in a million.”