

# Wisconsin Women in Government: Announces annual Scholarship & Recognition Gala honorees

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Wisconsin Women in Government (WWIG), a statewide, bipartisan, non-profit organization, is proud to announce the honorees who will be celebrated at its Annual Scholarship and Recognition Gala. The Gala will recognize the Legacy Award, Rising Star Award, and scholarship recipients, in addition to the graduates of the Leadership Seminar.

The Gala will be held on Wednesday, May 17, 2023 at the Monona Terrace Community & Convention Center in Madison. To register, please visit [wiscwomeningovernment.org/events](http://wiscwomeningovernment.org/events).

The “Legacy Award” honors a woman who has made significant professional contributions throughout her career to local, state, and/or national government. WWIG is thrilled to present this year’s Legacy Award to:

## **Janet Piraino**

Janet has 40 years experience as a top advisor to some of Wisconsin’s most highly regarded public sector leaders. She has worked at the state, local and national level, both in Madison and Washington, DC. She spent a decade in Wisconsin state government as a legislative staffer; 8 years as Chief of Staff to Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz; and 17 years as a congressional staffer, including Chief of Staff to then-US Rep. Tom Barrett, State Director to US. Sens. Tammy Baldwin and Russ Feingold, and District Director to US Rep. Mark Pocan. She also worked as the Development Director for Overture Center for the Arts and in Intergovernmental Relations for the University of Wisconsin System. She recently came out of retirement for a

temporary position as Assistant Deputy Secretary with the Department of Revenue working on their legislative agenda. In her spare time, you'll find Janet volunteering for various election- and campaign-related efforts, tutoring for the Literacy Network, riding her bicycle in rural Wisconsin, or walking her gorgeous German Shepherd, Sadie.

The "Rising Star Award" honors a woman who has been in her profession for 10 years or less, but has demonstrated excellence by making an extraordinary impact in her profession relative to her years of service. WWIG is thrilled to present this year's Rising Star Award to:

### **Karen DeSanto**

Karen DeSanto is a non-profit leader, development director and renowned rural advocate living in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Karen serves as Chief Executive Officer of the Boys & Girls Clubs of West Central Wisconsin. DeSanto was honored as *2020 Boys & Girls Clubs of America National CEO of the Year*, selected from over 1100 club executives nationwide. Karen graduated from the *Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Clown College* in 1993, going on to become one of the country's leading comedic instructors. After creating her own entertainment production business, clowning took her to the stages of Carnegie Hall, Macy's Thanksgiving Parade, Ocean Park China, Cunard Cruise Lines in Finland & Sweden, and before Kings, Queens and celebrities. In her role as a Club CEO, Karen tripled the scope and size of the organization over a dozen years, with her work becoming a national template on how to grow clubs across rural communities. Elected in 2019 as the first woman President of the Wisconsin Alliance, Karen guided clubs through the pandemic, securing over \$26 million in federal and state funds during her term. In 2019, she was honored with the *Club Horizon Award*, and the *Women In Industry Award* from InBusiness Magazine. Karen is most proud of being the mother of an incredible daughter. While living her best life, Karen is hopeful that every young person will have the opportunity to enter a career that is both financially stable and personally fulfilling.

### **Bonnie Reese Scholarship Recipient**

This year's recipient of the Bonnie Reese Legislative Internship was Annie Gonring, who had the opportunity to intern at the Wisconsin Legislative Council. Annie was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and will graduate from Marquette University Law School on Saturday.

Annie applied for an internship at Wisconsin Legislative Council because of the agency's unique ability to benefit the common good — giving legislators and their constituents access to unbiased legal information makes Wisconsin a better place. Annie will begin her legal career in June by practicing elder law at a non-profit organization in Milwaukee.

### **Undergraduate Scholarship Recipients**

**Jesaea Hameister**, University of Wisconsin La Crosse, Public Administration/Legal Studies

**Elena Patilliet**, Beloit College, International Relations/Middle Eastern Studies

**Heidi Straub**, Moraine Park Technical College, Criminal Justice

### **Leadership Seminar Graduates**

The Wisconsin Women in Government Leadership Seminar provides an opportunity for participants to learn from a panel of experts who share their experiences in public service. These leaders blend a layered and nuanced approach for participants on how to navigating a rapidly changing workplace and marketplace in highly visible organizations.

Ruhamah Bauman	Hannah Brown	Laura Bub
Allyssa Costello	Courtney Geiger	Andrea Gugel
Kaylin Helm	Jeannie Jeanetta	Kiley Komro
Lisa Lumley	Laurie Mercurio	Gina Paige
Gloria Palencia	Laura Reinke	Anne Reis
Kate Riordan	Michelle Schultz	Erin Smith
Larissa Tomczak	Crystal VonHoldt	Kaitlyn Wender
Diamond Williams	Pamela Williams	Melissa Youngbauer