

# 2023 ATHENA AWARD CELEBRATION

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

*Thank you for joining us at the 26<sup>th</sup> annual ATHENA Award® Celebration.*

*This year's event will recognize and honor 8 nominees who have achieved excellence in their work, devoted time in their communities, and helped women realize their full leadership potential.*



Presented by



## MEET THE NOMINEES

Ginger Auchter	Dera Johnsen-Tracy
Rachellee Bly	Zach Ketterhagen
Rebecca Carlin	Dana Pellebon
Shar Hermanson	Rachel Snethen

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# ATHENA AWARD<sup>®</sup> PROGRAM

The ATHENA Award<sup>®</sup> Program was created through the Chamber of Commerce in Lansing, Michigan, by Martha Mayhood Mertz. The ATHENA Award is presented annually by chambers of commerce, women's organizations and universities. The award is established through local host organizations in partnership with ATHENA International's national underwriters, local businesses and individual sponsors.

Here in Dane County, the ATHENA Award Program was initially hosted by The Business Forum along with the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce, the United Way of Dane County and Ahrens Oldsmobile. The organizations welcomed the opportunity to recognize ATHENA nominees' achievements and to raise scholarship money for high school students and women returning for secondary education offered through The Business Forum Foundation. After much planning and preparation, The Business Forum awarded its first ATHENA Award in 1998.

As of 2022, The Business Forum Foundation has awarded more than \$460,000 in scholarships. The Business Forum members and our sponsors are proud of the efforts in helping women achieve their full potential and look forward to even greater accomplishments in the future.



## **MISSION STATEMENT OF ATHENA INTERNATIONAL**

**SUPPORTING, DEVELOPING AND HONORING  
WOMEN LEADERS**

**INSPIRING WOMEN TO **ACHIEVE** THEIR  
FULL POTENTIAL**

**CREATING BALANCE IN **LEADERSHIP** WORLDWIDE**



*Your attendance means so much!*

Proceeds from the ATHENA Award Program go to The Business Forum Foundation, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that awards scholarships to high school students and adult women pursuing secondary education.

26<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL

# ATHENA AWARD<sup>®</sup>

CELEBRATION

3:00–5:00pm

**3pm** | Registration, Hors D'oeuvres,  
Basket Raffle, Networking

**3:45pm** | Program Begins

WELCOME

SEHADE CARTER

ATHENA YOUNG PROFESSIONAL RECIPIENT

DOMINIQUE CHRISTIAN

THE BUSINESS FORUM VIDEO

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

CARRIE WATERS-SCHMIDT

SPECIAL GUESTS AND SPONSORS

KIM BURLAGE

MESSAGE FROM PLATINUM SPONSORS

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DR. MARVIN HANNAH – ANTHEM BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD

RECOGNITION OF NOMINEES

LEIGH MILLS

ATHENA RECIPIENT ANNOUNCED

CARRIE WATERS-SCHMIDT

CLOSING

26<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL

# ATHENA AWARD<sup>®</sup> CELEBRATION

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*Our sponsors play a vital role in our mission, helping us support and strengthen the women in our community. Thank you to everyone supporting this year's ATHENA celebration!*

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26<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL

# ATHENA AWARD<sup>®</sup> CELEBRATION

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## **GINGER AUCHTER**

*Director of Scientific & Engineering Talent  
Carex Consulting Group*

Ginger Auchter is a mentor and role model for her team members and students in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). As Carex Consulting Group's Director of Scientific and Engineering Talent, she built the Scientific and Engineering recruiting teams from ground up. She believes in her team, who were new to the recruiting field when they started at Carex Consulting Group. Through her willingness to share her breadth of knowledge and her help in opening doors, her team is able to grow professionally, participate in development activities and join in leadership opportunities. Ginger encourages open dialogue and honest opinions, which makes for a great working environment for those around her.

Her co-nominator, Becky Hines, wrote, "Ginger is the reason I had the confidence to make a career pivot from chemical engineer in a lab setting to technical recruiter on her team. Every time I questioned myself and my capabilities throughout my onboarding, Ginger never hesitated to reiterate her trust in me. The kindness and patience she brings to every interaction enables those around her to show up at their best and as their authentic selves. I'm incredibly grateful for this invaluable opportunity to have such a supportive female mentor as a woman in STEM myself."

Ginger's impact expands beyond her own team. Her recruiting talents match STEM-trained individuals with innovative, growing companies. A successful match creates an opportunity for groundbreaking scientific and engineering research and development. Her co-nominator, Andie Dumond, acknowledges that Ginger's recruiting talents have "undoubtedly had a lasting impact on the STEM community and beyond."

Ginger is also a role model to young women who may be interested in a STEM career path and routinely teaches university and tech schools students about the excitement of STEM fields.

Ginger is an Advisory Board Member for the Chemical Technology Program and the Biochemical Excellence in Science and NSF Grant Program at Milwaukee Area Technical College. These programs strive to increase the number of students transitioning to baccalaureate degrees in STEM and provide a foundation in chemistry and chemical technology courses and labs. While the programs are open to all students, there is an emphasis on encouraging minorities, women and other under-represented populations in STEM.



## **DR. RACHELEE BLY**

*Principal*

*Kennedy Elementary School*

Dr. Rachelee Bly is a principal at Kennedy Elementary School in the Madison Metropolitan School District. She grew up in Beloit, Wisconsin as a shy little girl who did not talk much because she shuttered throughout grade school. Despite her shyness, she always had big dreams and felt that there was always something bigger for her to accomplish. She attended a summer Pre-Collegiate Program at Beloit College

and later participated in the summer residential Pre-College Program Camps at UW-Whitewater. After getting a taste of what it was really like to go to college, receiving a college degree became her goal. She received a bachelor's degree in Education, a master's degree in Curriculum and Instructions and a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis.

Rachelee pursued education as a career so that she could provide support for students who may need a little push or guidance in the right direction. She created restorative spaces for young girls in 4th and 5th grades to meet during lunch recess to build meaningful relationships and their own confidence. She also encouraged these girls to participate in Girls Who Rock After School Program. This passion is what led her to her current role as a board member and secretary with the Girl Scouts of Wisconsin – Badgerland, where she works to ensure equity of access and diversity of representation.

Rachelee's nominator, Marci Henderson, noted, "Dr. Bly is someone that has a talent in meeting a child where they are. This shows through her work in the Beloit School District and continues into her work with the Madison Metropolitan School District and with Girl Scouts. She guides them to see their own self-worth and potential and knows how to cultivate them to reach that potential."

Rachelee has mentored many students and young teachers. She takes particular interest and pride in helping young black and brown girls to see their true potential as life-long learners and thinkers. She understands their struggles and offers advice and encouragement to help them face the challenges they will encounter as they proceed through their educational careers. She has kept in close contact with many who continue to seek her guidance as they persevere in college and beyond.



## REBECCA CARLIN

*Executive Director*

*Wisconsin Youth Company*

Throughout her professional career, Rebecca Carlin has led and supported other women to lead with creativity, compassion and enthusiasm. She is currently the executive director for Wisconsin Youth Company (WYC), a nonprofit entity based in Dane County that serves approximately 3,000 children and teens each year in programs offered in Dane and Waukesha Counties.

During her time with WYC, Rebecca collaborated with community residents, local elected officials and City of Madison staff to open the Theresa Terrace Neighborhood Center in 2015. Rebecca's efforts directly contributed to the Center's success. She understood the importance of listening to community residents and building programming that reflected the neighborhood's needs. She hired staff from the area who were already connected to the community and hosted multiple community events to learn from community members while opening the new center.

In 2019, Rebecca worked closely with other neighborhood center directors in Madison to advocate for a change in Madison's funding that would be more equitable and create a path for funding new neighborhood centers. She organized meetings, assisted in developing a strategy, worked with city staff and met with the Mayor to successfully pass this new funding model, which is still in effect today.

In 2020, Rebecca again aligned with neighborhood center directors to meet with the new Madison Metropolitan School District Superintendent to discuss how neighborhood centers could support student learning during the pandemic. Under Rebecca's direction, WYC ran in-person, all-day programs to support children with virtual learning throughout the pandemic. These programs supported families who were not able to work remotely and needed a safe place for their children to learn virtually.

Rebecca has coached and supported many women into leadership roles. Her nominator, Carrie Waters Schmidt, wrote, "Rebecca cares deeply for her team of more than 80 employees and believes that taking care of staff is the foundation of providing great services to families. That is why, under her leadership as executive director, wages have been raised sustainably over time to ensure a living wage for all employees. Rebecca has also expanded benefits for all employees and created additional full-time positions to ensure that caring for children after school can be a sustainable career path."





## SHAR HERMANSON

*Director of Strategy*

*Mid-West Family Madison*

Demonstrating opportunities for young women and minorities is a mission that Shar Hermanson takes very seriously. Her nominator, Jenna Piche, called Shar “a transformational leader, a daring marketing trailblazer and a dedicated advocate for local community and the professional development of women.”

In 2011, Shar accepted the position of director of digital sales when most businesses did not recognize the value of digital marketing. She was integral in helping local businesses learn how to use search engines and social media. This was not the only professional challenge of her career.

Later, Shar moved to Mid-West Family Madison with a dream to transform the traditional media sales team into full funnel marketers. Soon thereafter, Mid-West Family Madison executed on Shar's dream and rebuilt its business model to help its customers grow with traditional media products and push the market to develop creative messaging that would make its customers successful. Shar played an integral role in casting an audacious vision, building the structure to support the new business model and creating goals for the performance of new departments. She recruited the brightest marketing talent that elevated the strategic partnership for customers' growth.

This transformation led Mid-West Family Madison to win the company's most prestigious award, The Walker Cup. The Walker Cup is awarded based on growth over the previous year's achievements—tremendous growth made possible because of Shar's leadership and her partnership with all Mid-West Family employees.

Shar is also active in the community. She serves on the board of directors for the YWCA of Rock County. She helps guide the YWCA with its goals, recruitment assistance, fundraising opportunities and spreads the word about its mission. As a result of her work with the YWCA, Shar is currently assessing Mid-West Family's opportunity to hire more women and minority women. This initiative involves interviewing previous minority employees to understand their experience, creating goals to development a more inclusive environment and setting timelines to engage in these crucial conversations.

She also started a website called [www.girlsguidetototalworlddomination.com](http://www.girlsguidetototalworlddomination.com).



## **DERA JOHNSEN-TRACY**

*Partner/Co-Founder, Estate Planning Attorney, Public Speaker, Author*

*Horn & Johnsen SC – Estate Planning Center of Wisconsin*

Attorney Dera L. Johnsen-Tracy is a shareholder and co-founder of Horn & Johnsen SC. She focuses her legal practice in the areas of estate planning, probate and adult guardianship. Prior to completing law school, Dera worked as a paralegal for fourteen years. Dera's paralegal experience provided a practical client-centered foundation for her legal practice. She strives to meet the needs of her clients in a personal and efficient manner.

Dera was an active participant in the Wisconsin Wills for Heroes program and the Basic Estate Planning Clinic for Seniors and Veterans. She received the 2015 Individual Attorney Pro Bono Award by the Dane County Bar Association and the 2016 Pro Bono Attorney of the Year Award by the State Bar of Wisconsin for her participation in these programs. These awards were not the only recognitions Dera received for her legal skills.

Dera was selected by Super Lawyers to the 2016–2019 Wisconsin Rising Stars list, which is an exclusive list recognizing no more than 2.5% of attorneys in Wisconsin. In addition, she was selected as a member of the Fellows of the Wisconsin Law Foundation, an elite professional honor for Wisconsin attorneys, in 2016.

She willingly shares her legal knowledge with the public. Dera has been a special guest on several radio shows and a featured presenter discussing estate planning issues at various conferences throughout the United States. Dera has presented about estate planning and living trusts, including special issues applicable to realtors, small business owners, farmers, pet owners, young families, LGBTQ families and families with children who have special needs. She is a frequent contributor to Your Family Magazine and to the national AAIL Journal. She has also taught a variety of continuing education to financial professionals and attorneys.

Her nominator, Chassidy Comella, remarked, "Dera has overcome incredible odds stacked against her, and as a young, single mother who, through determination and sacrifice, went to law school while working a full time job and excelled in everything she put her mind to. Her choice to work in the estate planning field was an easy choice for her because of her passion to protect family's legacies, and to make a positive impact in other's lives and the community she serves."



## ZACH KETTERHAGEN

*Founder*

*Self-Leadership Collective, LLC*

Zach Ketterhagen is the owner of Self-Leadership Collective, LLC. In 2022, he launched several resources to assist leaders in their development, wellbeing and clarity. For example, Zach created Meditation for Optimal Performance 21-Day Challenge, a resource for leaders to confidently adopt a proven meditation habit. He also designed a workshop to help leaders understand their unique self-leadership playbook to maximize their leadership authenticity and impact.

For over fifteen years, Zach has taught meditation and yoga. He created Yoga and Ecstatic Dance Events in conjunction with Perennial Yoga. During these events, he teaches leaders how to embrace the immense power of their bodies through yoga, ecstatic dance and healing. The goal of these events is to give leaders the skills to create sacred space within them to lead authentically and to embody their highest leadership capacity.

He also led the meditation portion of Perennial Yoga Teacher Training and shared the gift of meditation with thirteen female teacher trainees so they may adopt a proven meditation system and share with their future students.

Zach also served on a variety of boards. He was as a board member for the Fond du Lac Spirituality and Healing Yoga Center from 2020 to 2021. As a board member, he created systems and processes to support healing and empowering through yoga, meditation and wellbeing offerings. He also served as a Madison Magnet board member from 2018 to 2021. In this role, he led the Community Involvement Committee and created opportunities for young professionals to volunteer, donate and support local non-profit organizations.

Zach works at Health Rosetta, a benefits and healthcare think tank, where he coaches benefits advisors on how to adopt proven fixes for their employer clients' health plans. He was behind the scenes of hundreds of health plans adopting common sense, purchasing best practices.

Zach is married to Crystal Ketterhagen. Zach stated, "My wife is an entrepreneur and one of my biggest honors is supporting her leadership, business, and innovation. She is currently developing community around 21st Century Spiritual Skills to help women embody their intuition and feminine power. I serve on the board of her growing organization." Zach and Crystal have two boys, Dante and Hugo.

# 2023 ATHENA AWARD® NOMINEE



## **DANA PELLEBON**

*Executive Director*

*RCC: Sexual Violence Resource Center*

Dana Pellebon is the Executive Director of RCC: Sexual Violence Resource Center (RCC). Under her leadership, RCC has been transformed and programs have evolved and expanded to meet the complex needs of sexual violence victims and survivors, including the rapid expansion of therapy and mental health services.

In all facets of her life, Dana shines a light on inequity and empowers those who have often been left out of the cultural narrative. For example, Dana is active in the theatre and arts scene in Madison, working with women to help them find their own voices as storytellers and artists.

Through her nonprofit board service, Dana consistently ensures that those who are the most historically excluded are centered in all decision making. She challenges others to think creatively and find new ways to advance equity and inclusion.

In 2022, Dana was elected to the Dane County Board of Supervisors. In this role, she serves on numerous committees and is the Co-Chair of the Criminal Justice Council Racial Disparities Committee. Additionally, she serves as a mentor for the Youth Governance Program, inspiring future generations of women to consider elected office.

Dana was recently appointed by the National Association of Counties to the CORE (County Officials Advancing Racial Equity) Justice Network, a cohort of fifteen elected officials across the United States to work to eliminate racial disparities in the criminal justice system and advance equitable practices.

Dana continues to inspire the next generation of nonprofit leaders and community activists. As a woman of color in leadership, Dana navigates the intersecting challenges in a white and male dominated landscape. She is always available to younger Executive Directors – particularly other women of color who know they have a safe person to turn to as they experience the same challenges. Dana is committed to lifting up the next generation.

One of Dana's nominators, Shannon Barry, remarked, "Not only has Dana devoted her professional life to serving some of our community's most vulnerable and marginalized populations in new and revolutionary ways, she is also a fierce advocate and volunteer within various spaces who is committed to dismantling systems which uphold oppression of all kinds, particularly oppression of women, BIPOC people, and the LGBTQIA community."

# 2023 ATHENA AWARD® NOMINEE



## **RACHEL SNETHEN**

*Director of Development Coordination  
Gorman & Company*

Rachel Snethen leads the Development Coordination and Marketing teams at Gorman & Company. She provides training, mentorship, and implementation of best practices among the teams. She manages efforts between various funding partners through closing, construction, and stabilization of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, market rate, and workforce housing. Rachel also directs corporate marketing strategy and branding initiatives.

Rachel's specialty is developing special real estate projects involving EB-5, New Markets Tax Credits, and foreign investor transactions. She collaborates with key international project partners in China, legal counsel, and market economists to work through EB-5 projects from concept to construction completion. She works on lobbying efforts in Washington D.C. to improve the EB-5 program by meeting directly with Senators and Congresspersons to advocate for the need for EB-5 in highly distressed markets for job creation.

She is a member of Gorman & Company's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee and Gorman's Executive Leadership Team. Rachel is also a member of several professional organizations, including the CREW Network, which exists to transform the commercial real estate industry by advancing women globally. She is also a member of the Society for Marketing Professional Services.

Rachel is an active volunteer in her community. She is a former Fort Atkinson School Board Vice President. She is a district activist leader for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and is responsible for communicating the priorities of the organization to government officials. For the last fifteen years, she has served as a blood drive coordinator for the American Red Cross. She is also a member and past president of the Oregon Rotary Club and the founding member and social media co-chair of the Environmental Sustainability Rotarian Action Group.

Rachel has an MBA from Franklin University and a bachelor's degree in management. In addition, she holds an associate degree in real estate from Madison College.

Rachel's nominator, Laura Gallagher, wrote, "I admire and respect Rachel professionally and personally. What I appreciate most is her genuine way of relating to others while also getting the job done. She works hard. She brings a strong financial background to the table and the ability to work with a wide range of people, from investors to construction project managers and her marketing team."

# THANK YOU TO ALL OUR EVENT PARTICIPANTS

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