

# DRAW OF THE GROWER EDUCATION CONFERENCE & INDUSTRY SHOW IS STRONGER THAN EVER

# WPVGA & UW Division of Extension saw record attendance for trade show and researcher presentations

By Joe Kertzman, managing editor, Badger Common'Tater

There's something special brewing in Wisconsin that has potato and vegetable growers, associated businesses, industry professionals, and the University of Wisconsin Extension buzzing.

Record attendance is once again a topic of conversation following the 2024 Grower Education Conference & Industry Show, February 6-8, at the Holiday Inn & Convention Center in Stevens Point.

A nationally respected potato conference, the Industry Show is now 18 BC'T March

in its 74th year and continues to be a showcase for the state's established potato and vegetable production area.

Unique as a dual effort between the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) and University of Wisconsin (UW) Division of Extension, the combined Grower Education Conference & Industry Show features researcher presentations and an established tradeshow under one roof.

Growers and industry professionals

from across the country traverse the show floor, catching up with associates, networking, and forging new relationships, but also taking in a full slate of reports on current issues affecting farmers everywhere.

As part of the inaugural Student Leadership Development Workshop, selected university and technical college students attended the Conference & Industry Show, on Tuesday, free of charge.

Above: Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) Executive Director Tamas Houlihan (left) and Dr. Russell Groves, professor and chair, University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison Department of Entomology, prepare to welcome guests to the 2024 Grower Education Conference & Industry Show. The event is a dual effort between the WPVGA and UW Division of Extension.

They met with Mike Copas, senior agronomist for RPE, Inc., in the morning for a short initiation and continental breakfast before hitting the tradeshow floor to meet with exhibitors and learn about the vast business and career opportunities available to them.

The students attended the "Bringing Value to Agriculture" session consisting of five 10-minute presentations given by select exhibitors who apply for the opportunity to discuss new technologies, tools, services and approaches that their companies offer.

#### **AGRICULTURE 101**

University and technical college students also enjoyed "Agriculture 101" presentations by UW-Madison base-funded researchers in the areas of disease management, soil health and fertility, weed management, potato breeding, potato agronomics, and agricultural economics.



Not only was the inaugural Student Leadership Development Workshop a great opportunity to expose developing professionals—the future workforce—to the Wisconsin agriculture industry, but also a chance for business leaders to showcase their companies, areas of focus and career opportunities.

A range of ag businesses and professionals populated booths on the sold-out show floor to meet

Above: Mike Copas (standing), senior agronomist for RPE, Inc., and Niles Franc (right), Wisconsin Seed Potato Certification Program field inspector, address university and technical college students, Tuesday, February 6, who participated in the inaugural Student Leadership Development Workshop.

face-to-face with growers, dealers, researchers, brokerages, and other attendees to show off the latest in

continued on pa. 20





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continued from pg. 19

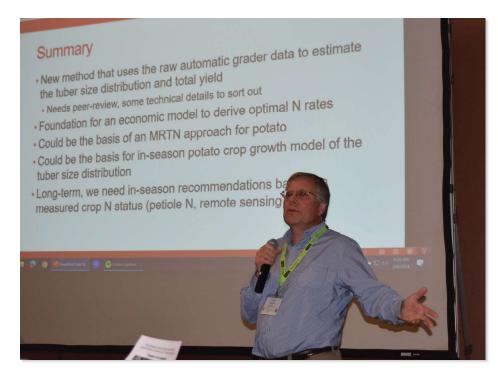
products, machinery, technologies, and services.

It is a chance to exhibit technologically advanced equipment, remote sensing, computers, and controls that help potato and vegetable growers become more efficient farmers who use less water, fewer inputs, and more environmentally friendly practices as the stewards of the land and food providers.

Exhibitors included implement manufacturers and dealers; irrigation companies; banks and credit unions; insurance agencies; the technology sector; fertilizer, chemical and biochemical companies; ag associations; parts dealers; building contractors; seed suppliers; crop consultants and more.

Just over 230 people pre-registered for, and hundreds more attended, the Grower Education Conference, taking full advantage of informative sessions covering issues directly affecting ag businesses.

With the help of the WPVGA Grower Education Planning Committee, Dr. Russell L. Groves put together a comprehensive, timely, and information-packed lineup of



research presentations.

The range of topics included disease and weed management, fungicide resistance, potato breeding, nutrient management, soil microbiomes, cover crops and soil health, diploid potato breeding for variety development, nitrogen use efficiency and nitrate leaching, tuber storage, and precision agriculture practices in sustainable vegetable production.

Above: Dr. Paul Mitchell, interim associate dean of academic affairs and professor, UW-Madison Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, presents "Maximum Return to Nitrogen for Potatoes" at the Grower Education Conference on Tuesday.

#### **ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT**

Dr. Jed Colquhoun, professor in the UW-Madison Department of Plant and Agroecosystem Science, discussed how enforcing the Endangered Species Act may soon







Left: Julie Cartwright (right), Jay-Mar, Inc., was happy to meet Melissa Ploeckelman, an outreach specialist with the Marshfield Clinic Health System, in the cancer screening room. Conference and show attendees could get free skin cancer screening during the event as part of a service partnership between Marshfield Clinic and the National Farm Medicine Center.

Right: National Potato Council Chief Operating Officer Mike Wenkel (left) visits WPVGA Director of Promotions & Consumer Education Dana Rady at the United Potato Growers Cooperative of Wisconsin booth.





limit pesticide use; and Dr. Laura Shannon, associate professor in the University of Minnesota-St. Paul Department of Horticultural Science, talked about using image analysis to breed for potato quality traits.

continued on pg. 22

Left: Portage County Extension Ag Agent Ken Schroeder (left) stopped by the Jay-Mar, Inc. booth to chat with Wayne Solinsky. Chris **Brooks of Central Door Solutions and his** crew are in the background.

Right: From left to right, Jay Warner and Nate Bolton of Warner & Warner, Inc. talked business with Andy Diercks, Coloma Farms, and Tom Bulgrin, Gumz Farms, at the **Industry Show.** 



As part of the Grower Education Conference, Dr. Jed Colquhoun, professor, UW-Madison **Department of Plant and Agroecosystem** Science, discussed how enforcement of the Endangered Species Act may soon limit pesticide use.





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continued from pg. 21



During the Grower Education Conference & Industry Show, J.D. Schroeder (left) of Schroeder Bros. Farms had a nice discussion with Dr. Paul Bethke (center), research geneticist and professor, UW-Madions Department of Plant and Agroecosystem Science, and Mike Copas (right), senior agronomist for RPE, Inc.



At the Grower Education Conference & Industry Show, former WPVGA Associate Division Board member Tom Domaszek took time to check out potatoes on display as part of the Wisconsin Potato Variety & Advanced Selection Evaluation Trial.

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Penney Hammer (left) and Ray Grabinski (second from right) of Progressive Ag chat with John E. Bushman (second from left) and Jeff Suchon (right) of Bushman's Riverside Ranch at the booth.



As revealed at the Industry Show, Butch Fencil (second from left) will be partnering with Zander Solutions, introducing the company, which has 50 years of experience in the spray foam industry, to Central and Northcentral Wisconsin potato and vegetable growers and associated businesses. Butch, the former owner of Fencil Urethane Systems, is standing next to, from left to right, Frank Acker (president), Shawn Klingforth, and Jason Pavloski of Zander Solutions. The company's newest office is the old Fencil Urethane Systems location in Wisconsin Rapids.





Researchers included those traveling from Oregon State University-Hermiston, North Dakota State University, Cornell University-Ithaca and Cornell Cooperative Extension-Albion, Washington State University and University of Minnesota-St. Paul.

To access a complete index of the 2024 Grower Ed Conference proceedings, watch presentations and see poster sessions, as well as those of previous years, visit http://wpvga.conferencespot.org/.

The Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association and WPVGA Associate Division held their annual reception on the show floor, Tuesday evening, including delicious appetizers and refreshments.

continued on pg. 24

Left: Deep in conversation at lunch on Wednesday are, from left to right, Dianne and Nick Somers and Jeanine McCain of Plover River Farms, Brian Stroetz from Wheeler's Chevrolet, and Peter Joyce, consultant for Potatoes USA.

Right: Eugene Mancl (left) and Greg Johnson (right) of Ron's Refrigeration were happy to host Thad Failor (second from left) and Ragen Darrington (second from right) of Industrial Ventilation, Inc. at the booth for the duration of the 2024 Industry Show.



continued from pg. 23





The WPVGA Associate Division Banquet, Wednesday evening, is the premier social event in the Wisconsin potato industry, including a social hour with appetizers and refreshments, dinner, Industry and WPVGA Hall of Fame awards, and entertainment.

In addition to the annual Industry Awards and WPVGA Hall of Fame induction, drawings for cash prizes totaled \$1,500, including more than 10 individual cash prizes and a \$500 grand prize winner whose name was drawn after the awards banquet and during the evening's entertainment.

The WPVGA Associate Division was happy to have UW-Stevens Point jazz group, the Mat Chapman Quintet, provide up-tempo entertainment for the evening.

The entertainment and camaraderie that went along with it was a nice way to wrap up yet another record-breaking Grower Education Conference & Industry Show.

Thank you to all sponsors who made the 2024 UW Extension & WPVGA Grower Education Conference & Industry Show possible! Please see the ad thanking sponsors on page 37. Above: During lunch on Tuesday, WPVGA **Executive Director Tamas Houlihan, at** left in both images, honored Mike Carter of Bushmans' Inc. (first image) and Bill Guenthner (second image) from Guenthner Farms with plaques in appreciation for their service on the WPVGA Board of Directors. Carter and Guenthner each completed their second terms on the Board. At a brief meeting held immediately following the WPVGA Annual Meeting, February 8, in Stevens Point, the Board of Directors elected Charlie Mattek of J.W. Mattek & Sons Inc. as its president for 2024, John Bustamante of Wysocki Family of Companies as vice president, Alex Okray from Okray Family Farms as secretary, and Wendy Dykstra, Alsum Farms & Produce, to the treasurer position. The rest of the WPVGA Board of Directors includes Mike Baginski, Baginski Farms, Randy Fleishauer from Plover River Farms, John Hopfensperger of Bushmans' Inc., Josh Knights from Heartland Farms, Inc., and J.D. Schroeder, Schroeder Bros. Farms, Inc.



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Wisconsin Potato Growers Auxiliary President Heidi Schleicher updates Wednesday Awards Banquet guests on the Auxiliary's activities, fundraisers, and educational initiatives and programs.

## WPVGA Presents Industry Awards to Deserving Members

Ag industry professionals dedicated to service recognized at the 2024 banquet

The premier social event in the Wisconsin potato industry, the WPVGA Associate Division Awards Banquet includes a social hour with appetizers and refreshments, this year sponsored by American Drone, Nichino America and Volm Companies, dinner, presentation of the awards, including the WPVGA Hall of Fame induction, and entertainment.

A nice way to cap off the Grower Education Conference & Industry Show, the Awards Banquet recognizes those who go above and beyond in furthering the causes of the Wisconsin potato and vegetable growing industry.

An impressive group of awards recipients was recognized.

The WPVGA Associate Division Business Person of the Year Award was presented to **Bill Page** of Insight FS. Bill started his career with Farm Bureau Cooperative in August of 1977. At the time, the coop had \$1.5 million in agronomy sales.

His job morphed over the years from salesman into sales manager and purchasing. The company name was changed a couple times, grew, and merged with other Growmark locations and is now Insight FS.

Currently the agronomy sales in the Antigo location are over \$28 million,



Bill Page

while total sales for the location are over \$55 million. Bill now handles sales and purchasing for specialty crops, and in 2020, Bill was named Certified Crop Advisor of the Year.

continued on pg. 26



continued from pg. 25

When Bill was in college, potatoes 101 didn't exist. That class started the day Bill started work at Farm Bureau Coop. It was taught by the smartest, nicest, and most successful people you could ever meet—the farmers. From Antigo and Rhinelander to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, these growers are why he is here today.

As one nominator stated, "Bill has worked with the growers of the Antigo area for his entire 40-plusyear career. During that time, he has helped growers improve their yields while only selling what is needed by the growers. He does not sell extra fertilizer just to sell more product; he is a firm believer that if the farm is successful, then he will be."

Bill is soon to be retiring and his contributions to the industry will be sorely missed.

Randy Fleishauer of Plover River Farms, Stevens Point, was named the WPVGA Volunteer of the Year. The general manager of Plover River Farms Alliance since 2017, Randy is the out-going president and a current member of the WPVGA Board of Directors.

For 25 years, Fleishauer worked as a



Randy Fleishauer

farm manager specializing in potato and wheat production for R.D. Offutt Company in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and South Dakota.

After 25 years, and with a strong agricultural background and love for Wisconsin and the Midwest, Fleishauer joined a farm known for sustainable and eco-friendly practices, including prairie restoration



Dan Walsch

on portions of the land as part of the Wisconsin Healthy Grown program. Owned by Nick Somers, Plover River Farms has been in his family for generations.

Randy is chairman of the WPVGA Vegetable and Processor Relations (Frozen) committees, and a board member on the Research and Grower Ed Planning committees.

He also serves on the National Potato Council Advisory Committee to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and was appointed to the Wisconsin Ag Producers Security Council.

As the out-going WPVGA board president, Fleishauer also presented the President's Award to his coworker, **Dan Walsch**, in grateful appreciation for outstanding service and dedication to Plover River Farms.

In 2017, Dan started working at Plover River Farms as an intern, and after graduation, joined the farm on a full-time basis as an agronomist.

He oversees field operations, scouting, spraying, irrigation scheduling and harvest operations.





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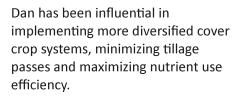
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continued from pg. 26



**Charlie Husnick** 



A graduate of the WPVGA Member Development Program in 2022, Dan enjoys the day-to-day variability of farming and working with the team at Plover River Farms, saying it's the



**Brooke Babler** 

team that makes overcoming daily challenges easier.

This year's WPVGA Young Grower of the Year Award went to **Charlie Husnick**, a farm manager for Baginski Farms, Inc., in Antigo.

Charlie was hired at Baginski's, in 2015, where they grow a rotation of seed potatoes, soybeans, and oats across 2,000 acres annually.



Richard Pavelski

Charlie was a 2018 graduate of the Potato Industry Leadership Institute, and a 2019 Graduate of the WPVGA Member Development Leadership Training Program.

He currently serves on the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association Board and the United Potato Growers of Wisconsin Board, as well as being a Wisconsin representative on Potatoes USA.

The WPVGA Researcher of the Year Award was presented to **Brooke Babler**. Brooke is the associate program director of the Wisconsin Seed Potato Certification Program and previously served as certification and research manager.

She oversees seed potato certification in Wisconsin, including a substantial diagnostic program to support clean potatoes, potato tissue culture maintenance, and the production of mini tubers for earliest generation seed production in Wisconsin.

Further, Brooke provides education and outreach on potato production and potato certification. Her research includes evaluating the performance of potato plantlets grown in potted,



hydroponic and aeroponic systems.

Winner of the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association Seed Industry Leadership Award in 2023, she is a potato expert with great leadership in disease diagnostics and the certification process.

Richard Pavelski received the Agri-Communicator Award for excellence in communication and outstanding service to the potato and vegetable industry.

Dick is a fourth-generation farmer with roots dating back to 1873 when his great-grandfather, August Pavelski, emigrated from Poland. Dick is the founder of Heartland Farms, Inc. in Hancock, one of the largest growers of chipping potatoes in the nation with over 20,000 acres of potatoes and vegetables.

A past president and Hall of Fame member of the WPVGA, Pavelski has served on the United States Potato Board and the National Potato Council and was a director of the National Fertilizer Solutions Association.

He is a past president of the Wisconsin Fertilizer and Chemical Association as well as the Wisconsin Agri-Business Council.

The Farming for the Future Foundation was founded by the Pavelski family and incorporated as a 501 C3 non-profit charitable organization in 2018.

Dick says, "Our mission is simple. People want to know where their food comes from, and farmers want to share those stories. We want to create common ground where people can learn more directly from the industry without taking away from the important work that must be completed to feed the growing world."

"With a grand opening in December of 2023, the Food + Farm Exploration Center is the physical manifestation of our mission," he adds.

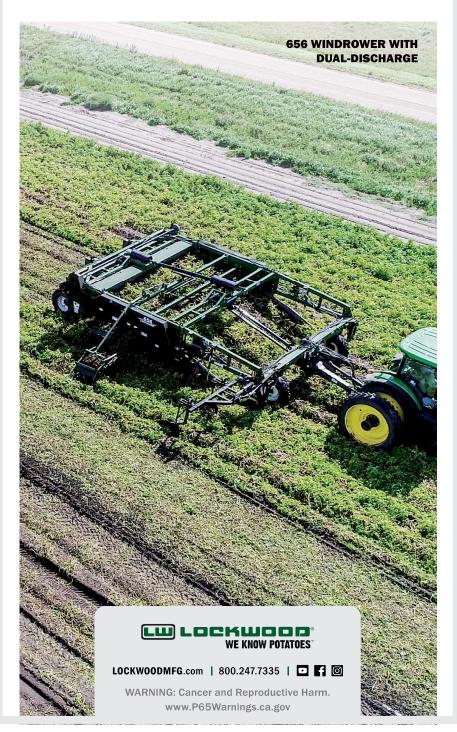
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continued from pg. 29

Special Industry Appreciate Awards went to **Kevin Schleicher** of Wysocki Family Farms, Bancroft, and **Dr. Paul Bethke**, a member of the UW potato team.

Dr. Bethke joined the potato team in Madison as a researcher with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and as a faculty member in the Department of Horticulture.

His research has focused on how different potato varieties respond to environmental conditions in the field and in storage, and how those responses influence potato tuber quality.

Over the years, his group has done research on cold-induced sweetening, senescent sweetening, skin set, stem-end chip defect, sugar end defect, acrylamide mitigation, the appearance of red skinned potatoes, aerial imaging, lenticels, Potato Virus Y, and diploid potatoes.

Paul has given timely updates on research at the Hancock Agricultural Research Station Field Day, the annual Grower Education Conference, and in articles written for the Badger Common'Tater.

Most of his research projects were done in collaboration with other members of the potato research team and with members of the grower community.



**Kevin Schleicher** 

Schleicher is the director of sales for Wysocki Family of Companies in Bancroft, which raises 25,000 acres of chipping potatoes, process potatoes, fresh potatoes, canning crops, and grains.

He currently serves as the president of the Wisconsin Potato Coalition, which partners with the University of Wisconsin to improve the efficiency of seed potato production at the Lelah Starks Elite Foundation Seed Potato Farm in Rhinelander.

Kevin also serves as a Wisconsin



Dr. Paul Bethke

representative on the Potatoes USA Board of Directors, serving on the Administrative and International Marketing committees, and as vice chair on the Executive Committee of the Portage County Business Council.

During dinner and after the awards ceremony, the UW-Stevens Point jazz group, the Mat Chapman Quintet, entertained guests. During the entertainment, cash prizes were awarded to attendees lucky enough to have their names drawn at the banquet.

continued on pg. 32

#### **2024 INDUSTRY AWARDS RECIPIENTS**

Associate Division Business Person of the Year:

**Bill Page** 

WPVGA Volunteer of the Year: Randy Fleishauer

WPVGA Young Grower of the Year:

**Charlie Husnick** 

WPVGA Researcher of the Year: **Brooke Babler** WPVGA Board President's Award: **Dan Walsch** 

Agri-Communicator Award: Richard Pavelski

WPVGA Industry Appreciation Awards:

Kevin Schleicher and Paul Bethke

Recognition of out-going WPVGA Board Members:

Mike Carter and Bill Guenthner

Recognition of out-going WPVGA Associate Division Board Member: **Andy Verhasselt** 

WPVGA Hall of Fame Induction: Ron Krueger



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continued from pg. 30

## Ron Krueger Enters the WPVGA Hall of Fame

Longtime general manager of Eagle River Seed Farm, Ron Krueger was inducted into the WPVGA Hall of Fame at the industry's annual Awards Banquet on February 7, 2024.

The WPVGA Hall of Fame honors lifetime achievement in the development of the state's potato industry. It is the intention of the WPVGA to continue to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the potato industry in Wisconsin by making annual Hall of Fame inductions.

Born in Tomahawk, Wisconsin, to Clarence and Joy Krueger,

Ron's family, including two brothers and one sister, lived on a dairy farm, in Irma, that had been in the family since the early part of the 1900's.

"My grandfather grew potatoes, strawberries, miscellaneous vegetables and had a few dairy cows. My parents built on the dairy portion of the farm until they were milking around 32 head—not a very large operation by today's standards, but sustainable for that time," Ron relates.

Ron is a graduate of Tomahawk High School and attended UW-Stevens Point. "When



Ron Krueger was inducted into the WPVGA Hall of Fame, February 7, for his lifelong commitment to the Wisconsin potato industry.

I went off to college, I swore I would never return to farming," he says. "Later, I was extremely glad that I had the opportunity to return to agriculture as a career."

He began his career in 1977 as the farm supervisor for the Frito-Lay Genetics research farm, in Starks, Wisconsin. After 15 years with Frito-Lay, Ron moved on to become the general manager for Felix Zeloski Farms, in 1992, and stayed for 30 years before his retirement in 2022. Felix Zeloski Farms became Eagle River Seed Farm, LLC, in 2014.

#### **EAGLE RIVER SEED FARM**

Nestled in the middle of the world's largest inland chain of lakes, Eagle River Seed Farm supports a tremendous amount of wildlife as well as natural scenic beauty. Established by Felix M. Zeloski, his son, Dennis, took over in 1973.

In his career, Krueger oversaw the growing of 1,100 acres of early generation certified seed potatoes (including numerous varieties),



certified seed oats, barley, wheat, soybeans, and clover.

Ron was active in the WPVGA, serving four three-year terms on the Board of Directors, including a term as president in 2005. He was co-chair of WPVGA Research Committee, and Government Affairs and SpudPro committees, working on the SpudPro Committee from its inception until his retirement.

Ron also sat on the Board of the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association for two separate sixyear terms, including four years as president.

"Dennis was the person who encouraged me to join the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association Board of Directors. That was my introduction to the inner workings of the Wisconsin potato industry," Ron notes.

#### **AWARDS & HONORS**

Ron's awards and honors include the 2006 and 2014 WPVGA Volunteer of the Year Award, 2013 Wisconsin Seed Potato Industry Leadership Award,

2007 Frito-Lay Seed Supplier of the Year honor, and National Potato Council Environmental Stewardship Award.

Ron and his wife, Mary, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on September 21 of this year. They have two daughters, Kara and Katee, five grandchildren, and three greatgrandchildren.

In his free time, Ron enjoys golf, hunting, boating and woodworking.

"I've learned so much over the years from people like Dennis, the University of Wisconsin research team, and other growers who have been more than willing to share their knowledge and experiences," Ron says.

"I am personally grateful every day for the opportunities I've had and the people I've met along the way who've contributed to my success," he concludes.

Congratulations, Ron, on your induction into the WPVGA Hall of Fame. BCT



#### **Complete List of WPVGA** Hall of Fame Members and Years Inducted

#### 1990

Joseph L. Bushman Ben H. Diercks Myron Mommsen Edward J. Okray John Okray W. James Prosser Lelah Starks James D. Swan Barron G. West

#### 1991

Felix Zeloski

Henry M. Darling Robert H. Diercks Melvin E. Luther Albert M. Pavelski Henry L. Woodward

#### 1992

Lawrence Krogwold Michael Patrykus John A. Schoenemann Clarence Worzella Louis E. Wysocki

Champ Bean Tanner Frnest Bushman Melvin Hugo Rominsky Lawrence (Larry) Lapcinski Wayne Brittenham

#### 1994

James Burns, Sr. Myron D. Groskopp James Wencel (J.W.) Mattek Hal Roberts

#### 1995

A.F. (Bill) Hoeft Bennett Katz Eugene Katz Donn "Hokey" West

Charles M. Creuziger Alois (Al) Okray Joseph Jacob Okray Stanley J. Peloquin

#### 1997

Anton (Tony) Gallenberg Howard F. Chilewski

#### 1998

Dave Curwen Francis Gilson Emil Perzinski

#### 1999

John J. Bushman James G. Milward

#### 2000

Dean Kincaid Henry V. Sowinski

#### 2001

(Presented in Feb. 2002) James J. Mattek Francis X. Wysocki

#### 2002

(Presented in Feb. 2003) **Robert Hougas** Gerri Okray

#### 2003

(Presented in Jan. 2004) Larry Binning Peter Wallendal

#### 2004

(Presented in Feb. 2005) Jerome Bushman **Harold Sargent** 

(Presented in Feb. 2006) Ed Wade Dennis Zeloski

#### 2006

(Presented in Feb. 2007) Don Kichefski

#### 2007

(Presented in Feb. 2008) Walt Stevenson

#### 2008

(Presented in Feb. 2009) Victor Anthony Jeffrey Wyman

#### 2009

(Presented in Feb. 2010) John Landa Robert Stodola

#### 2010

(Presented in Feb. 2011) John H. Schroeder August Winkler

#### 2011

(Presented in Feb. 2012) Fred and Kathryne Meyer Howard "Skip" Tenpas

(Presented in Feb. 2013) Steve Diercks Mike Finnessy

(Presented in Feb. 2014) Myron Soik

#### 2014 (Presented in Feb. 2015)

Robert Helbach 2015 (Presented in Feb. 2016)

#### Charles Cofer **Robert Guenthner**

(Presented in Feb. 2017) Donald Hamerski Richard Pavelski

#### 2017

(Presented in Feb. 2018) **Nick Somers** 

#### 2018

(Presented in Feb. 2019) Dr. Keith Kelling

(Presented in Feb. 2020) Larry Alsum Dick Okray

#### 2020

(Presented in Feb. 2021) Marv Worzella Norm Worzella

#### 2021

(Presented in Feb. 2022) Paul Miller

#### 2022

(Presented in Feb. 2023) Randy Van Haren

#### 2023

(Presented in Feb. 2024) Ron Krueger