



HOULIHAN RECEIVES OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO AGRICULTURE AWARD

WPVGA Executive Director honored for commitment to progress and success of agribusiness industry

By Joe Kertzman, managing editor, Badger Common'Tater

On March 4, Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) Executive Director Tamas

Houlihan received the Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture Award from the Portage County Business

Council during its annual American Agriculture Appreciation Banquet.

Each year, the Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture Award is presented to a deserving individual for commitment to the progress and success of the agribusiness industry, and for significant contributions to the agribusiness community.

Held at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Convention Center, in Stevens Point, the American Ag Appreciation

Above: Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association Executive Director Tamas Houlihan (center) accepts the Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture Award from Portage County Ag Agent Ken Schroeder (right), as well as a Citation of Commendation for his contributions to agriculture from Sen. Patrick Testin (left).



Banquet is the premier Portage County event honoring agriculture and agri-businesses, 4-H leaders and youth, and FFA high school seniors.

This year's banquet was sponsored by Del Monte Foods, the Food + Farm Exploration Center, Team Schierl Companies, and the WPVGA.

Following a social hour, Portage County Business Council President and Chief Executive Officer Michael Witte welcomed guests to the banquet and gave an invocation before dinner.

The master of ceremonies, Portage County Ag Agent Ken Schroeder, introduced this year's keynote speaker, Tony Schultz, owner of Stoney Acres Farm, in Athens, Wisconsin.

Tony's presentation, "Diversity and Sustainability: Serving the Legacy of Farming in Wisconsin," delved into farmers being jacks of all trades, the meaning of community-supported



agriculture, buying local, crop and livestock diversification, organic farming, and his pride in owning a family farm.

THIRD-GENERATION BUSINESS

Established in 1948, Stoney Acres Farms is a third-generation business converted from dairy to an organic crop and livestock operation serving

Above: Award recipients pose with Sen. Patrick Testin (right) at the Portage County Business Council's American Agriculture Appreciation Banquet. From left to right are Tamas Houlihan (Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture Award); Jacob Spoelstra (4H Leadership in Agriculture Award); Porter Stuczynski (Agri-Business Scholarship winner); Jaclynn Kaminski, Abby Sekerka, and Caleb Mroczenski (Outstanding FFA Senior awards); and Sen. Testin.

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the Wausau Farm Market, including the winter market, and retailers and consumers in a roughly 45-mile radius around Athens.

It encompasses 12 acres of organic produce, including 220 varieties of grains, beef cows, swine, feed crops, vegetables, herbs, and even honey and maple syrup.

During the ceremony, plaques were awarded to students in the categories of 4-H Leadership in Agriculture (youth), and Outstanding FFA Seniors, as well as the presentation of an Agri-Business Scholarship to a high school senior pursuing a career in agriculture.

A highlight was the Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture Award, which Schroeder presented to Houlihan, saying, "Businessman Tamas Houlihan has been a force in Central Wisconsin agriculture for many years."

"On December 4, 2014, the WPVGA Board of Directors announced that Tamas had been named Executive Director of the association," Schroeder continued. "For the previous 27 years, he served as the managing editor of The Badger Common'Tater magazine, the official voice of the Wisconsin potato and vegetable industry."

A 1985 graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Tamas has a bachelor's degree with a



In accepting the Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture Award, Tamas Houlihan (left) stated, "I am grateful for the support of my family, especially my brilliant and beautiful wife, Paula [right], and grower mentors and colleagues who have stood by me, taught me, and helped me through thick and thin."

double-major in communication and German. He received the Chancellor's Leadership Award and the Albertson Medallion, all while working three jobs during college.

At the WPVGA, he received a Distinguished Service Award in 1997; the President's Award in 2001 and 2015; the Agri-Communicator Award

in 2008; and the Wisconsin Seed Potato Industry Leadership Award in 2011. He was also honored with the National Potato Council President's Award in 2020.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

"Tamas's community involvement is second to none," Schroeder said, "leading numerous meetings, serving



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on industry boards, advocating where needed, facilitating contract negotiations, participating in events and conferences, campaigning for fundraisers, grant writing, and so much more, all to improve community relations and help address the industry's issues and concerns."

Tamas lives in Stevens Point with his wife, Paula, of 16 years. They have seven children and eight grandchildren. He enjoys biking, playing softball, worldwide travel, golfing and is an avid sports fan who loves football (especially the Green Bay Packers, of course).

"Tamas has made his mark as one of our community's most respected, influential leaders and is a pillar of our community," Schroeder concluded. "We are pleased you have chosen Portage County as the place to make a difference, Tamas, because indeed, you have!"

In accepting the award, Houlihan said, "I am deeply honored and humbled to stand before you today as the recipient of the Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture Award."

"This recognition is not just a testament to my individual efforts, but a celebration of the collective dedication and resilience of all those who work tirelessly in the fields, day in and day out, to feed the world," he said, "as well as those who help them do so."

"Agriculture is more than just a profession, it's a way of life," he added. "I am fortunate to be part of this noble profession, and I accept this award on behalf of every farmer and agricultural worker who labors with unwavering commitment and passion."

"I am grateful for the support of my family, especially my brilliant and beautiful wife, Paula, and grower mentors and colleagues who have stood by me, taught me, and helped me through thick and thin," Houlihan stated.

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- Tamas Houlihan,
WPGVA Executive Director



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STAFF RECOGNITION

He then emphasized the outstanding work done by the staff of the WPVGA, saying, "Their hard work, guidance, encouragement, and unwavering belief in the importance of our work have been the driving force behind all my achievements. I could not do it without them, and they are directly responsible for me receiving

this award."

Houlihan pledged to continue advocating for the interests of farmers and rural communities, championing sustainable practices, and promoting innovation in agriculture.

He asked banquet attendees to keep in mind that America's farm families

represent only two percent of the population that feeds the other 98 percent with the fruits of their labor, a dramatic demographic shift from the nation's first 100 years when most Americans lived and worked on farms.

"By working together, we can build a brighter future where every individual has access to nutritious food, where farmers are valued and respected, and where the land thrives for generations to come," Houlihan said.

Wisconsin Senator Patrick Testin also presented Houlihan with a Citation of Commendation for his contributions to agriculture.

As Houlihan suggested, "Let us continue to work together, hand in hand, to cultivate a more prosperous and sustainable future for agriculture and our planet."

The annual Portage County Business Council's American Agriculture Appreciation Banquet recognizes individuals who do just that. **BCT**

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AMERICAN AGRICULTURE AWARDS

4-H Leadership in Agriculture:
Jacob Spoelstra

Outstanding FFA Senior Awards:
Abby Sekerka, Pacelli (through the Rosholt High School FFA program); Jaclynn Kaminski, Rosholt High School; and Caleb Mroczenski, Stevens Point Area Senior High School

Agri-Business Scholarship Recipient: Porter Stuczynski

2024 Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture Award:
Tamas Houlihan, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association