



# ATTENDANCE WAS GOOD FOR 71ST GROWER ED CONFERENCE & INDUSTRY SHOW

The plans and people came together for a successful exhibit of everything Wisconsin agriculture

By Joe Kertzman, managing editor, *Badger Common'Tater*

The well-regarded Grower Education Conference & Industry Show succeeded in its mission of shining a bright light on Wisconsin's potato and vegetable growing industry and bringing all parties together on February 4-6, 2020, at the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Stevens Point.

Booth holders reported good traffic and plenty of opportunity

for networking with growers and researchers, spreading word of their companies, latest products, technologies, services and standards.

A collaborative effort between the University of Wisconsin (UW) Division of Extension and the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA), the 71st Grower Education Conference



**Top:** Implement dealers brought out the big equipment for the 2020 Grower Education Conference & Industry Show, February 4-6, at the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

**Right:** The welcoming committee was out in full force for the 2020 Industry Show, including, from left to right, Tim Clark of Stokes Seeds Inc., and Moriah Rataczak and Kalie Christensen of Gumz Farms.



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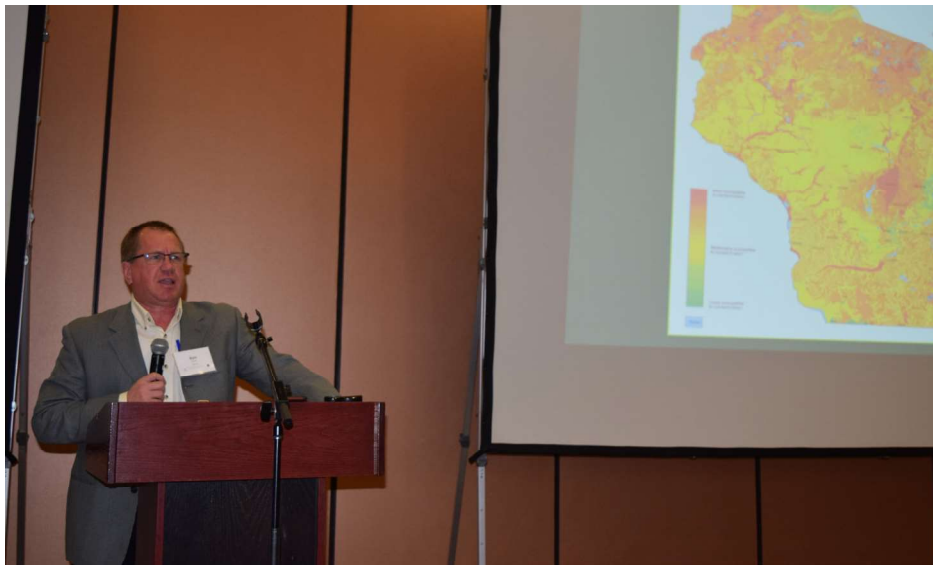


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**Left:** As part of the Grower Education Conference, Ken Potrykus, hydrogeologist for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, discussed "Groundwater Quality Surveillance in Wisconsin's Agricultural Sensitive Regions."

**Right:** Booth exhibitor Mike Caves proudly displays an award his employer, Pro Fleet Care, bestowed upon him in recognition of his outstanding business accomplishments and "Going the Extra Mile" for the company.

& Industry Show provided the opportunity to conduct business, forge relationships and discuss relevant issues.

More than 400 people registered to take full advantage of researcher presentations and informative sessions on issues directly affecting

agriculture during the Grower Education Conference.

In an age of email, social media and telemarketing robocalls, it's more imperative than ever to meet face-to-face with fellow growers and associated businesses and forge

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## 71st Grower Ed Conference & Industry Show . . .

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a path to a successful future.

The WPVGA and UW Extension take their responsibilities of putting the right people together seriously.

Growers and agriculture companies serving them have persevered and triumphed through weather events, governmental regulations, farm consolidation and public apathy to



emerge stronger than ever.

### THE FOOD PROVIDERS

On full display during the Industry Show were technologically advanced equipment and systems to 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

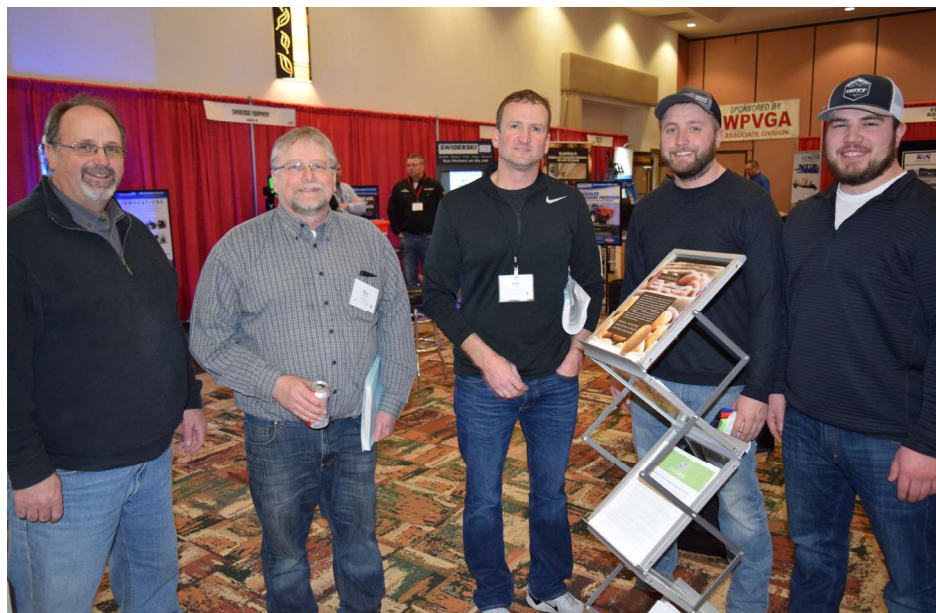
**Left:** A Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate Fellow, Department of Agronomy, UW-Madison, Elizabeth McNamee tackled the timely topics of irrigation scheduling and precision irrigation to improve water use efficiency in the Central Sands.

**Right:** Kurtis Goman of Flyte Family Farms tosses a beanbag for a chance to win a jacket at the Bushmans' Inc. booth during the Industry Show, with Mike Gatz (white shirt) manning the booth and refereeing.



A good time was had by all at the 2020 Industry Show, particularly, from left to right, booth holders Tony Grapsas, Tom Grall and Julie Cartwright of Jay-Mar, Inc., Plover, Wisconsin.

20 BC'T March



The Antigo seed potato growers were well represented at the Industry Show, including, from left to right, Dan Kakes, Roy Gallenberg, Dan Wild, Aaron Kakes and Ryan Fassbender.





food providers.

Through the efforts of WPVGA staff members, particularly Executive Assistant Julie Braun and Financial Officer Karen Rasmussen, and the Associate Division Board, crowds seamlessly navigated the aisles of the show floor and populated the educational presentations.

The growers are to be commended and admired for always using best practices, experienced techniques and putting in long hours, pushing through planting and harvest seasons

to put food on the table.

Booth holders included irrigation companies and implement dealers; banks and insurance agencies; the technology sector; fertilizer plants and chemical corporations; credit unions; parts dealers; building and roofing contractors; seed suppliers; crop consultants; equipment manufacturers and more.

With the aid of the WPVGA Grower Education Planning Committee, Dr. Russell L. Groves, UW-Madison Department of Entomology, put

**Left:** Ray Grabanski (left) of Progressive Ag Insurance talks shop with Kerry Larson (right) of McCain Foods during the 2020 Industry Show.

**Right:** Something was interesting on Jay Warner's phone that held the interest of Andy Diercks (blue shirt with back to the camera) of Coloma Farms. Jay represented Warner Packaging at the Industry Show.

together a stellar lineup of researcher presentations on timely topics.

Topics ranged from factors influencing insecticide resistance to new potato breeding methods,

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Before delving into a presentation on the effects of post-harvest fungicides on pink rot and Pythium leak, Dr. Jeff Miller, president and CEO of Miller Research, lightened the mood by showing off a freebie football he got from the Hansen-Rice Inc. booth at the Industry Show.

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## 71st Grower Ed Conference & Industry Show . . .

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On display at the Grower Ed Conference & Industry Show were potatoes and chips from the UW-Madison Potato Variety & Advanced Selection Evaluation Trial.



precision agriculture, market development, disease management, genome engineering and efforts to promote conservation.

Groundwater quality is a hot-button issue in sensitive agricultural regions, as is pesticide use, irrigation scheduling, soil health, post-harvest disease management and breeding for late blight resistance.

### GROWER ED PRESENTATIONS

To access an index of the 2020 Grower Education Conference proceedings, watch presentations and see poster sessions, as well as those of previous years, visit [http://](http://wpvga.conferencespot.org/)

[wpvga.conferencespot.org/](http://wpvga.conferencespot.org/).

In its fourth consecutive year, the WPVGA Associate Division's "Bringing Value to Agriculture" session, Tuesday, February 4, consisted of five 10-minute presentations given by select exhibitors.

Exhibitors apply for the opportunity to discuss new technologies, tools, services and approaches their companies offer in agricultural management of potato and vegetable production systems.

Attendees anticipate an annual reception, Tuesday evening, hosted

by the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association and WPVGA Associate Division.

The WPVGA and Associate Division banquet, Wednesday night, has become the premier social event in the Wisconsin potato industry, including a nice social hour, dinner, awards and entertainment.

In addition to the annual industry awards, there were drawings for cash prizes, with \$1,500 given away, including more than 10 individual cash prizes and a \$500 grand prize winner. Banquet attendees were treated to a nice mix of popular



The 2020 Industry Show brought together Dale Nelson (left) of Nelson's Vegetable Storage Systems, Art Seidl (center) of Seidl Farms and Dale Bowe (right) of Wisconsin Public Service.



Moderator Larry Binning (left), professor emeritus, UW-Madison, hands over the video monitor controls to Dr. Heidi Kaeppeler, associate professor, Department of Agronomy, for her presentation on "Genome Engineering/Editing of Potato, Vegetable and Specialty Crops."





Moriah Rataczak (left) of Gumz Farms engages Mike Baginski (center) and Charlie Husnick (right) of Baginski Farms in conversation during the 2020 Industry Show.



Enjoying lunch on Wednesday, February 5, at the Industry Show are, from left to right, Jordan Lamb, DeWitt, LLP; Nick and Dianne Somers of Plover River Farms; and Jessi Ebben, Republican candidate running for Wisconsin's 3rd Congressional District.



songs by Around Town after the awards ceremony.

**Our sincere thanks** to all sponsors who made the 2020 UW Extension & WPGA Grower Education Conference & Industry Show possible! For a list of sponsors, see the ad thanking them on page 71.

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**Left:** Mallika Nocco, assistant cooperative Extension specialist in soil-plant-water relations at the University of California, Davis, gave a talk on using drones for water and nitrogen management at the Grower Education Conference.

**Right:** From left to right, Dick Thorpe and Sandra and Marty Kolpack make for a colorful trio standing in front of the patriotic ThorPack, LLC booth backdrop.



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## WPVGA Honors Deserving Members

2020 Industry Awards recognize those who lead by example

The WPVGA and Associate Division Awards Banquet is an anticipated and fun way to cap off the Industry Show each year.

A nice complement to researcher presentations, the Industry Show and business networking, the Awards Banquet is a way to recognize those who go above and beyond in furthering the causes of the potato and vegetable growing industry.

Held the evening of February 5, a social hour with hors d'oeuvres sponsored by McCain Foods was

followed by a nice meal, the Industry Awards and two Hall of Fame inductions.

An impressive lineup of awards recipients gratefully accepted their honors followed by the local Stevens Point band, Around Town, providing a mix of popular songs to entertain the crowd. Cash prizes were awarded attendees lucky enough to have their names drawn during the banquet.

Following is a list of awards and recipients.



The WPVGA Associate Division presented the Associate Division Business Person of the Year Award to **Dale Bowe** of Wisconsin Public Service. Dale has been an outstanding volunteer for the WPVGA Associate Division for many years, serving two terms on the Associate Division Board of Directors and continuing to serve on the WPVGA Water Task Force and the Spud Bowl Committee. He has helped the WPVGA governmental affairs efforts by volunteering to lobby in Madison as part of the annual Ag Day at the Capitol events, helped the WPVGA Promotions Committee by volunteering at Spudmobile events and does tremendous work each year in helping to coordinate the Oshkosh Farm Show.



A fourth-generation farmer at Seidl Farms, **Jeff Fassbender** was named WPVGA Young Grower of the Year. He is particularly proud of the farm's reputation of producing clean, quality seed. Jeff is president of the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association Board of Directors, having held many positions, including vice president, secretary/treasurer and promotions chair. He is a member of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association and the SpudPro Committee.



The WPVGA Researcher of the Year Award went to **Dr. Paul Bethke**, an associate professor in the UW-Madison Department of Horticulture. In 2006, Dr. Bethke joined the potato team in Madison as a researcher with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. His research is focused on how genetics and the environment influence potato tuber quality, especially as it relates to quality out of storage. His group is currently working on projects related to diploid potatoes, the appearance of red skinned potatoes, the formation and consequences of lenticels, aerial imaging, stem-end chip defect and potato virus Y.

**Cliff and Carole Gagas** of Gagas Farms Inc. were named the WPVGA Volunteers of the Year. Carole was president of the Wisconsin Potato Growers Auxiliary Board for six years, and Cliff has been on the Wisconsin Potato Industry Board for many years, including a term as president of the Board. Cliff is also a past board member of the United Potato Growers of Wisconsin. As a member of the Auxiliary, Carole has been volunteering to serve baked potatoes at the Wisconsin State Fair since the mid-1980's, and Cliff also volunteers when needed. In coordination with the Auxiliary, Cliff and Carole have been running the baked potato booth at the WPS Farm Show, in Oshkosh, since 2008, and have been baking potatoes many years for the annual Spud Bowl in Stevens Point.

# THE 2020 AWARD RECIPIENTS

## Associate Division Business Person of the Year:

Dale Bowe

## WPVGA Volunteer of the Year:

Cliff and Carole Gagas

## WPVGA Young Grower of the Year:

Jeff Fassbender

## WPVGA Researcher of the Year:

Dr. Paul Bethke

## President's Award:

Jody Meddaugh

## WPVGA Industry Appreciation Award:

Nick Laudenbach

## Agri-Communicator Award:

Jerry Knutson

## Recognition of out-going WPVGA Associate Division Board Members:

Nick Laudenbach

Sally Suprise

## Recognition of out-going WPVGA Board Members:

Eric Schroeder

Gary Wysocki

## WPVGA Hall of Fame Induction:

Larry Alsum

Dick Okray



The Agri-Communicator Award for excellence in communication and dedicated service in spreading a positive message about the agricultural industry was presented to the family of the late **Jerry Knutson** of Oasis Irrigation. They are, from left to right, Dawson, Lindsay, Kathy, Preston and Chase. Jerry was instrumental in helping the potato and vegetable industry pass the recent high capacity well bill into law, testifying at the Wisconsin Senate hearing in Madison, and his testimony was outstanding. He received the most questions from the legislators and had intelligent answers for everything they asked. His effective communication went a long way toward convincing the legislature to pass that bill into law. Jerry had many passions in his life and family was top on the list. He treasured having his three boys working by his side. He married Kathy Jo Wilson on August 13, 1994. Jerry passed away on December 14, 2019, as a result of a snowmobile accident in Michigan. He was a great industry supporter and will be sadly missed.



A special WPVGA Industry Appreciation Award was presented to **Nick Laudenbach**, president of Fencil Urethane Systems. Nick served on the WPVGA Associate Division Board for four years, including two as treasurer. As a member of the Board and as a liaison on the WPVGA Promotions Committee, he has helped plan and volunteered to work at the Associate Division Putt-Tato Open golf outings, the Grower Education Conference & Industry Show and the Hancock Field Days.



2019 WPVGA Board President Wes Meddaugh (left), of Heartland Farms, presented the President's Award to his lovely wife, **Jody Meddaugh**, for all her love, support and guidance.

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## Alsum and Okray Enter WPVGA Hall of Fame

The Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (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.

The following includes brief biographical sketches of the WPVGA Hall of Fame inductees. Awards were presented at an annual awards banquet, February 5, 2020, held during the WPVGA Grower Education Conference & Industry Show in Stevens Point.

### LAWRENCE ALSUM

Lawrence "Larry" Alsum serves as president and CEO of Alsum Farms & Produce, Inc., Friesland, Wisconsin.

Larry grew up on his family's rural Wisconsin dairy farm near Randolph and is the oldest of eight children. After graduating from Randolph High School, he attended the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in accounting.

In 1981, Larry became the general manager of Alsum Produce, Inc. after his cousin, Glen Alsum, who started the business in 1973, died tragically in a plane crash. This year, Larry will be completing his 39th year as president and CEO of the company.

Under Larry's leadership, Alsum Farms & Produce has grown into an integrated group of companies involved in the production, packaging, marketing and shipping of potatoes and onions, and the wholesale distribution of a full line of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Larry feels privileged to continue his family's farming tradition, with his current operation growing nearly 2,700 acres of potatoes along the lower Wisconsin River Valley in Arena and in the Central Sands region in Grand Marsh.

Larry values the opportunity to work alongside his two daughters and their dedicated staff of 200 full-time employees.

### LEADERSHIP ROLES

In addition to his work at Alsum Farms & Produce, Larry has been involved in numerous professional organizations and served in leadership roles for the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA), National Potato Council, Potatoes USA and



Larry Alsum was inducted into the WPVGA Hall of Fame, February 5, for his lifelong commitment to the Wisconsin potato industry.

Wisconsin Institute of CPA's.

Larry is a past president of the WPVGA Board, past chairman of the Potatoes USA Board and most recently past president of the National Potato Council.

Larry has also served on the school board, church council, as a Sunday school teacher, volunteer fireman, chamber of commerce and on the Second Harvesters (Madison food bank) advisory committee.

Larry's favorite part about farming is working with great people and developing relationships with customers and suppliers. He also enjoys working in nature and seeing how we can interact to produce food in harmony with our environment and learning how to be good stewards of our soil, water and natural resources.

Larry and his wife, Paula, will celebrate 45 years of marriage this

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summer. They have been blessed with five children: Tim, Heidi, Wendy, Chad and Noah, and nine grandchildren. Larry enjoys biking, boating, triathlons and travel.

## RICHARD OKRAY

Richard W. “Dick” Okray was born October 24, 1958, in Stevens Point. The son of Joseph and Patricia Okray, he graduated in 1977 from Pacelli High School.

In 1981, he taught English in Cali, Colombia, and in 1982, he graduated from UW-Stevens Point with Bachelor of Art degrees in economics and Spanish.

He has been employed since 1982 at Okray Family Farms in Plover, growing 7,750 acres of quality row crops in Central Wisconsin, specializing in fresh channel potatoes. His current title and position are president and sales.

The national potato industry has benefited greatly from the leadership of Dick Okray.

He served on the Executive Committee of the U.S. Potato Board (now known as Potatoes USA) and has served as a potato industry

ambassador from the United States, attending several of the World Potato Congress events in locations as far away as China, Scotland and New Zealand.

Okray Family Farms received the National Potato Council’s Environmental Stewardship Award in 2016 for outstanding achievement in the area of pesticide risk reduction.

## ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY

Active in his community and industry, Dick has served on numerous organizations and boards, including the Wisconsin Migrant Labor Council; Saint Michael’s Foundation; United Potato Growers of Wisconsin and the United Potato Growers of America; Intevation Food Group; and the Edward J. Okray charitable Foundation.

Dick served two terms, including one as chairman of the International Committee, for the U.S. Potato Board.

He has also served on the Wisconsin Potato Industry Board since 2015, and currently holds the position of vice president of the WPIB. Last year, he became a board member of the Farming for the Future Foundation.

When asked about his awards and



Though Dick Okray was unable to attend the Awards Banquet, he sent a video expressing his gratitude for being inducted into the WPVGA Hall of Fame. Dick was inducted for his significant impact on the potato industry of Wisconsin.

honors, Dick said, “I am honored to know so many great people in the best industry in the world.”

Dick has been married to his wife, Carol, for 36 years. They have three adult children, Xerxes, Hannah, and Max.

Congratulations, Larry Alsum and Dick Okray, on your inductions into the WPVGA Hall of Fame. **BC<sup>T</sup>**

# 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  
Felix Zeloski

## 1991

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

## 1993

Champ Bean Tanner  
Ernest 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

## 1996

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

## 2005 (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 & Kathryn Meyer  
Howard “Skip” Tenpas

## 2012 (Presented in Feb. 2013)

Steve Diercks

## Mike Finnessy

**2013 (Presented in Feb. 2014)**  
Myron Soik

**2014 (Presented in Feb. 2015)**  
Robert Helbach

**2015 (Presented in Feb. 2016)**  
Charles Cofer  
Robert Guenther

**2016 (Presented in Feb. 2017)**  
Donald Hamerski  
Richard Pavelski

**2017 (Presented in Feb. 2018)**  
Nick Somers

**2018 (Presented in Feb. 2019)**  
Dr. Keith Kelling

**2019 (Presented in Feb. 2020)**  
Larry Alsum  
Dick Okray