



# MARKETPLACE WI

GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE ON DIVERSE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



DEC. 5-7, 2023



# Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

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Dear MARKETPLACE 2023 attendees:

On behalf of the state of Wisconsin, I'd like to welcome you to MARKETPLACE 2023: The Governor's Conference on Diverse Business Development.

For more than 40 years, MARKETPLACE has been connecting Wisconsin's diverse businesses with new opportunities. As you listen to the speakers and talk with business owners and buyers at this year's conference, I hope you make the connections needed for your business to continue to grow and succeed.

As you know firsthand, our small businesses and Main Streets are the hearts of our communities and play a critical role in both our local and statewide economies. That's why my administration and I have made investing in small businesses a major cornerstone of Wisconsin's economic development efforts, including creating the Main Street Bounceback Grant Program to help businesses move into new and vacant storefronts across our state. Out of the more than 9,400 small businesses that received grant funding through Main Street Bounceback Grant Program, over 6,800 of those businesses were owned by women, veterans, folks with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, and folks of color. This program has transformed downtowns and Main Streets across Wisconsin, and it's been extraordinary to see the ingenuity and innovation of Wisconsin's small business owners.

At MARKETPLACE, business owners can discover all the ways Wisconsin can support their dreams through education, resources, networking, and more. MARKETPLACE is also where the entire state can celebrate our diverse business community's accomplishments, resilience, and successes. The MARKETPLACE Governor's Awards honor outstanding, diverse-owned businesses of all sizes. These companies and entrepreneurs inspire us all and exemplify Wisconsin's values of hard work, innovation, entrepreneurship, and serving our communities.

While MARKETPLACE is three days packed with both virtual and in-person sessions designed to educate and connect businesses all across the state, Wisconsin supports its diverse businesses year-round through educational programs, grants, loans, and more—and those resources will be on display throughout MARKETPLACE.

My administration and I remain deeply committed to fostering, supporting, and embracing equity, diversity, and inclusion because we believe our differences make us stronger, not weaker, and that Wisconsin works best when everyone has that same the opportunity to build their dreams and achieve their goals.

The annual MARKETPLACE conference is a time for all of us to celebrate the successes of diverse businesses and build upon our work building a more prosperous Wisconsin for everyone.

I want to thank all the incredible entrepreneurs, business owners, and stakeholders who have joined us today. I hope you will take advantage of the many resources and networking opportunities available at MARKETPLACE this year, and thank you for all you do to help move our state's economy forward.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tony Evers".

Tony Evers  
Governor



Welcome to MARKETPLACE 2023!

On behalf of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), I am delighted to welcome you to the 42nd annual MARKETPLACE conference.

The Governor's Conference on Diverse Business Development is an opportunity for buyers and diverse businesses to connect, network and learn together. It's an opportunity for businesses to not only grow but to shine.

The Governor's MARKETPLACE awards highlight amazing businesses that are succeeding in their industries and communities.

I'd like to share a couple of my favorite statistics with you to show how incredibly important these businesses and opportunities are.

If we had as many women-owned businesses as male-owned businesses, Wisconsin would gain more than 108,000 new businesses – a 69% increase. That would create more than 574,000 new jobs and generate more than \$23 billion in payroll

If people of color owned businesses at the same rate as nonminority entrepreneurs, there would be an extra 47,000 businesses, adding 151,000 workers with \$4.2 billion in payroll.

To me, these numbers show the scale of the opportunity Wisconsin has with its diverse businesses, and the potential we have as a state.

At WEDC, we're working to build an economy for all.

That means funding organizations providing training, support and resources to entrepreneurs in all corners of our state from the Hmong American Center building a business incubator in Wausau to BizStarts offering training in English and Spanish in Milwaukee.

The state's \$128 million investment in the Workforce Innovation Grant program is also opening new opportunities for residents to thrive in our economy. The Down Syndrome Association of Wisconsin and its partners are providing training and support to help neurodiverse employees succeed and to encourage employers to offer more opportunities. Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin is working to help those dealing with mental health issues and trauma find success in the workplace.

All these efforts are about helping more Wisconsinites thrive in our economy. The perspectives and skills that diverse entrepreneurs and employees bring make Wisconsin more prosperous for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melissa L. Hughes", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Melissa L. Hughes  
Secretary and CEO

**LOOK FORWARD** ➤

# AGENDA

DEC. 5  
VIRTUAL  
THE CONTRACTING ACADEMY (TCA)

## 9 a.m. - noon

Will focus on best practices in business development and market research, as well as on how to leverage various types of business partnerships including mentor-protégé programs, joint ventures, subcontracting.

## 1 - 4 p.m.

Will feature discussions on opportunities, buying practices, selection criteria, and priorities with U.S. Dept. of Defense, civilian federal government agency, and federal prime contractor representatives.

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## ***DON'T MISS THE DIVERSE BUSINESS RESOURCE DIRECTORY!***

Many resources across Wisconsin are available to help diverse businesses thrive and grow. Visit our website to access a list of organizations you can contact to learn more about funding opportunities, mentorship, technical assistance, and certification in various diverse business categories.

**CONNECT WITH RESOURCES >**

# AGENDA

DEC. 6  
IN-PERSON  
BAIRD CENTER

**10 a.m. – 6 p.m. – Registration Open**

**10 a.m. – 3 p.m. – Exhibitor Move-In**

**2 – 4 p.m. – Emcee Welcome  
Room: 102CDE**

Dr. Eugene Manzanet, Senior Director, Diverse Business Development, WEDC

### **Business Opportunity Session**

Will feature presentations by project owners and general contractors about the scope of work of various megaprojects in Wisconsin and discussing their supplier diversity programs to facilitate diversely owned businesses' participation.

**Moderator: Lafayette Crump, Commissioner, City of Milwaukee**

#### **Panelists:**

- Rebecca Villegas, Vice President-Enterprise Compliance, Northwestern Mutual, presenting on the \$500 million North Office Building Modernization project
- Michael Morris, Pre-Construction Director, Walsh Construction, presenting on Microsoft's \$1 billion investment in Wisconsin to construct multiple data centers
- Aaron Popkey, Director of Public Affairs, Green Bay Packers, presenting on the 2025 NFL Draft in Green Bay
- S.R. Mills, CEO, Bear Development, presenting on Iron District MKE, a transformative sports and entertainment district centered around an 8,000-seat soccer stadium

### **Economic Opportunity Session**

Annual updates by WEDC, DOA, and SBA

- Dr. Eugene Manzanet, Senior Director, Diverse Business Development Program, WEDC
- Alex Ysquierdo, Director, Supplier Diversity Program, Wisconsin Department of Administration
- Eric Ness, Wisconsin District Director, U.S. Small Business Administration

## **Break**

### **Economic Opportunity Session (Continued)**

Report on the Economy

- Tom Walsh, Labor Market Economist, Wisconsin Dept. of Workforce Development

Guest Speaker:

- Farooq A. Mitha, Director, Office of Small Business Programs, U.S. Dept. of Defense

**4 – 5 p.m. – Education Workshops**

### **Building Relationships with Local Lenders**

**Room: 102CDE**

This workshop will support business owners who want to improve their knowledge of how banks and credit unions can help small business owners with their top three financial challenges: efficiency, process, and cost. Speakers will be on hand to discuss how a dedicated local business banker can offer guidance to face critical financial decisions. Our discussions will briefly focus on the risks of non-bank products and services that may appear to be insured but are not. The workshop will focus on accessing credit offered through government guarantees and programs that increase credit access through special-purpose credit programs (SPCPs) to better serve historically disadvantaged individuals and communities.

**Presenters:**

- Carol Maria, Community Affairs Specialist, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) Division of Depositor and Consumer Protection
- Mary Perry, President and CEO, Wisconsin Economic Development Association (WEDA)

# AGENDA

**DEC. 6**  
**IN-PERSON**  
**BAIRD CENTER**

*(Dec. 6 continued)*

## **4 – 5 p.m. – Bonding and Financing Resources for Small Businesses** **Room: 102AB**

Join representatives from the industry to learn more about resources available to support bonding and financing needs for your business.

### **Panelists:**

- Shane Mahaffy, Lead Business Opportunity Specialist, U.S. SBA
- Tammie Clendenning, Lead Economic Development Specialists, U.S. SBA
- David Schuppler, President, David Schuppler & Associates
- Rick Zawacki, Senior Business Loan Officer, First American Capital Corp.

**Moderator: Aina Vilumsons, President and Executive Director, Wisconsin Procurement Institute**

## **Building Capacity in Current and Aspiring DBE, MBE, and WBE Subcontractors** **Room: 103CD**

The purpose of the Construction Business Group's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Development Initiative (DBEDI) in collaboration with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) is to build further capacity, support growth, and provide development opportunities for selected State of Wisconsin-certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs) who seek certification in the transportation industry. The goal of DBEDI is to work with at least 15 small businesses that are currently certified or have been seeking their certification in 2022-23. Working closely with WisDOT's Office of Business Equity and Opportunity Compliance, DBEDI facilitated various opportunities for DBE utilization. Our commitment to the road-building industry is to build better DBEs for utilization by applying the following strategy:

- Create development opportunities for selected DBEs.
- Provide technical support for WisDOT certification.
- Assist with growth strategies.
- Provide assessments on where the DBE can upscale.
- Strategize entry points into the road-building industry.
- Determine selection into the DBEDI Master Class.

**Presenter: Joe Davis, DBE Development Director, Construction Business Group**

## **5 – 7 p.m. – Networking Reception in Expo Hall**

**Emcee: Dr. Eugene Manzanet, Senior Director, Diverse Business Development, WEDC**

### **Welcome**

Sponsor Remarks – Jeff Musa, Regional President for Southeastern Wisconsin, People's State Bank

WEDC Remarks – Missy Hughes, CEO

### **Awards Presentation**

Wisconsin Dept. of Administration Highest Spend Awards – Kathy Blumenfeld, Secretary, and Alex Ysquierdo, Supplier Diversity Program Director

U.S. SBA Award Presentation – Eric Ness, Wisconsin District Director

Business Anniversary Recognition – Dr. Eugene Manzanet

### **Closing**

Closing Remarks – Dr. Eugene Manzanet

# AGENDA

DEC. 7  
IN-PERSON  
BAIRD CENTER

## 6:30 a.m. – Registration Opens

### 7:30 – 9 a.m. – Breakfast Program

#### Emcee Welcome and Session Overview

Tim McMurtry, Executive Director of Infrastructure and Business Development, NAMC, and Rashi Khosla, President, MARS Solutions

#### Sponsor Remarks

Heather Ladage, Market President and Publisher, The Business Journal

#### Fireside Chats - Business Panel

Moderator: Michael Ward, Vice President of Business and Community Development, WEDC

#### Panelists:

- Alegra Fowler, Owner, Sweetgrass Behavioral Health
- Quinn Long, Owner, Clearcut Solutions
- Fanni Xie, Owner, Uni Uni Bubble Tea of Appleton
- Efrain Lara, Owner, Lara Associates LLC dba Milwaukee Pallets

#### WEDC Remarks

Sam Ridders, Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer

#### RNC Presentation

Alison Prange, Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor, MKE 2024 Host Committee

#### Closing Remarks from Emcee

## 9:15 – 11:45 a.m. – Expo Hall Open

#### Buyer Meetings

One-on-one matchmaking meetings with federal, state, local and corporate buyers

#### Exhibitors

Including corporate, small business, lenders, business resources, professional services, and government agencies

#### Business Networking Lounge

Centrally located within the Expo Hall; announcement microphone located near networking lounge; networking info table with bingo cards etc.

## 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. – Education Workshops

### Going Global: Building the Fundamentals, from Business Development to Compliance to Finance Room: 103CD

Hear from Wisconsin District Export Council members on fundamental topics for international growth, including financing, compliance, state and local resources for expansion and support, and local education opportunities for supporting international transactions.

#### Panelists:

- Susan Dragotta, Global Business Instructor, Waukesha County Technical College
- Bruce Glaub, Principal, Trade Acceptance Group, and Treasurer, Wisconsin District Export Council
- Chris Wojtowicz, International Trade and General Business Consultant, Wisconsin Small Business Development Center, and Chair, Wisconsin District Export Council
- Jane Dauffenbach, President, D&D Products Inc. / Aquarius Systems and Dynatek Divisions

Moderator: Chelsey Libeck-Duszynski, Senior International Trade Specialist, U.S. Commercial Service, Wisconsin

# AGENDA

DEC. 7  
IN-PERSON  
BAIRD CENTER

## 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. – Education Workshops *(continued)*

### **Unlocking the Power of E-Commerce: Ideas for Online Success**

#### **Room: 102CDE**

Did you know that as of 2021, there were 230.5 million e-commerce shoppers? With 76% of them checking a business's website before visiting the physical store or location, having an effective online presence has become crucial for success. Our panelists will discuss strategies to optimize websites, engage customers, and create seamless online shopping experiences. Perspectives from the service and manufacturing sectors will provide insight and strategies for leveraging technology effectively in today's digital era. This session will provide practical advice on how to establish a strong online presence, attract customers, and increase sales through e-commerce platforms.

#### **Panelists:**

- Ruben Contreras, Owner, Action Painting and Epoxy Coatings
- Carmen Leal, Author, I Chose You: Imperfectly Perfect Rescue Dogs and Their Humans
- Orson Fournillier, Co-Owner, Sharay's Ghana Style Brittle and Sweet P's Pantry
- Fanni Xie, Owner, Uni Uni Bubble Tea of Appleton
- Ziming Wu, Vice President, Wisconsin Chinese Chamber of Commerce

**Moderator: Amy Pietsch, Director, Fox Valley Technical College Venture Center**

### **Leveraging Certifications for Small and Diverse Businesses**

#### **Room: 102AB**

During this session, we will identify the different certification programs available to businesses, share some of the basics, and talk about how your business can leverage these certifications to build your business.

#### **Presenters:**

- Shane Mahaffy, Lead Business Opportunity Specialist, U.S. SBA
- Madalena Maestri, DBE Program Chief, WisDOT
- Alex Ysquierdo, Director, Supplier Diversity Program, DOA
- Shirlean Clayton, Certification Manager, Milwaukee County

**Facilitator: Aina Vilumsons, President and Executive Director, Wisconsin Procurement Institute**

## 10:30 – 10:45 a.m. – Break

## 10:45 – 11:45 a.m. – Education Workshops

### **Going Global: Wisconsin Small Business Development Center**

#### **Case Study with Carefree Enzymes**

#### **Room 103CD**

Hear from Chris Martin, owner of Wisconsin-based Carefree Enzymes, and Chris Wojtowicz of the Small Business Development Center as they discuss how they worked together to ensure that Carefree Enzymes had the fundamentals for export expansion and how the company is building its international presence with the help of both federal and local resources.

#### **Panelists:**

- Chris Martin, Owner, Carefree Enzymes
- Chris Wojtowicz, International Trade and General Business Consultant, Wisconsin Small Business Development Center, and Chair, Wisconsin District Export Council

**Moderator: Chelsey Libeck-Duszynski, Senior International Trade Specialist, U.S. Commercial Service, Wisconsin**



# AGENDA

DEC. 7  
IN-PERSON  
BAIRD CENTER

## 10:45 – 11:45 a.m. – Education Workshops *(continued)*

### **Financial Resources Supporting Diverse Businesses Room 102CDE**

Hear from diverse based organizations that received American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to provide technical and financial resources. The organizations will discuss the programs and services they administer to help diverse businesses in Wisconsin grow.

#### **Panelists:**

- Becky Albert, Executive Director, First Nations Community Financial
- Maysee Herr, CEO, Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce
- Terese Caro, President and CEO, Legacy Redevelopment Corp.
- Willie Smith, Executive Director, Northwest Side Community Development Corp.
- Nelson Soler, Ph.D., President and CEO, Latino Chamber of Commerce of South Eastern Wisconsin
- Michael Hetzel, Director of Lending, Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corp.

**Moderator: Marjorie Rucker, Chair, Ethnic and Diverse Business Coalition,  
and Executive Director, The Business Council**

### **Maximizing Success with Entrepreneurs of Color in Your Community Room 102AB**

Foster an equity-diversity-inclusion framework tailored to economic development and small business support organizations. Increase awareness of the diversity of entrepreneurs and what they need to succeed. Use evidence-based practices, data, and professional experience to move from awareness to action.

#### **Presenters:**

- Mia Ljung, Community Development Extension Educator, UW-Extension (Milwaukee County)
- Erica Carter, Community Development Extension Educator, UW-Extension (Outagamie and Winnebago Counties)

## 11:45 a.m. – Noon – Break

## Noon – 1:30 p.m. – Awards Luncheon Program

### **Emcee Welcome**

Tim McMurtry, Executive Director of Infrastructure Business Development,  
National Association of Minority Contractors-Wisconsin

### **Sponsor Welcome**

Suzanne Zwaska, Vice President of Community Affairs, U.S. Bank

### **WEDC Remarks**

Missy Hughes, Secretary and CEO, WEDC

### **Governor Invited**

Tony Evers, Governor, State of Wisconsin (Invited)

### **Awards Presentation**

- Outstanding Business of the Year
- Best Workplace
- Thought Leadership Excellence
- CEO of the Year
- Diverse Business Champion of the Year

### **Keynote Speaker**

Jessica Cavazos, Deputy Undersecretary of Commerce for Minority Business Development,  
U.S. Department of Commerce

### **Thank You and Concluding Remarks**

Dr. Eugene Manzanet, Senior Director of Diverse Business Development, WEDC and Tim McMurtry, Executive Director of Infrastructure Business Development, National Association of Minority Contractors-Wisconsin

# AGENDA

DEC. 7  
IN-PERSON  
BAIRD CENTER

**1:30 – 1:45 p.m. – Break**

**1:45 – 4 p.m. – Expo Hall Open**

**Buyer Meetings**

One-on-one matchmaking meetings with federal, state, local and corporate buyers

**Exhibitors**

Including corporate, small business, lenders, business resources, professional services, and government agencies

**Business Networking Lounge**

Centrally located within the Expo Hall; announcement microphone located near networking lounge; networking info table with bingo cards etc.

**2 – 3 p.m. – Education Workshops**

**Going Global: what you need to know when selling internationally**

**Room: 103**

Roundtable small group discussion meetings

Facilitator: Chelsey Libeck-Duszynski, Senior International Trade Specialist, U.S. Commercial Service, Wisconsin

**WiDEN Your Possibilities! and SizeUpWI**

**Room: 102CDE**

Learn about the Wisconsin Diverse Enterprise Network (WiDEN, [www.widen.biz](http://www.widen.biz)) and how it can help you scale your business and introduce you to procurement opportunities statewide. Later, learn how to use WEDC's free customized tool for small and midsize businesses. SizeUpWI provides access to the market research and business intelligence needed for growth and success. With SizeUpWI, businesses can discover potential customers and suppliers, optimize advertising and marketing to ideal customers, and much more.

**Presenters:**

- Marjorie Rucker, Chair, Ethnic and Diverse Business Coalition, and Executive Director, The Business Council
- David Fleming Sr., Program Specialist, WEDC Office of Rural Prosperity

**Mentoring: Critical for Personal and Business Growth and Development**

**Room: 102AB**

During this panel discussion, we will share information on various formal mentor-protégé programs and initiatives available to diverse businesses. We will also discuss how a diverse business can locate, identify, and target good potential mentors and what defines a good mentor-protégé relationship.

**Panelists:**

- Anna Steinfest, President, AFF Research
- Shane Mahaffy, Lead Business Opportunity Specialist, U.S. SBA
- Jean Marie Thiel, President, Belonger Corporation
- Courtney Skinkis, President, Confluence Graphics

**Moderator:** Aina Vilumsons, President and Executive Director, Wisconsin Procurement Institute

**3:45 – 4 p.m. – Conference Closing Remarks and Prize Winners Announced Expo Hall**

Dr. Eugene Manzanet, Senior Director of Diverse Business Development, WEDC

# THANK YOU, SPONSORS

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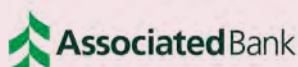
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# BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY SESSION



## Moderator - Lafayette Crump

**Commissioner, City of Milwaukee**

Lafayette L. Crump, JD, is the Milwaukee Commissioner of City Development. As a member of the Mayor's Cabinet, he leads a team dedicated to growing Milwaukee's population, bringing jobs into the city and keeping them there, increasing population density, facilitating the development of affordable and equitable housing options, and preparing Milwaukee and its residents for economic success in an increasingly technology-based economy. Under Lafayette's leadership, Milwaukee developed its first interagency housing program, joined with the Community Development Alliance and other local entities to create and implement the most comprehensive collective affordable housing plan in Milwaukee's history, provided millions of dollars in down payment assistance and pandemic-related business support, attracted the largest single infusion of jobs into downtown in decades, and is engaging in a broad review of its zoning code and development of a forward-looking strategic plan for its downtown. Born and raised in Milwaukee, Lafayette previously served as deputy chief of staff and chief diversity, vendor, and engagement officer for the Host Committee of the 2020 Democratic National Convention, where he engaged with businesses, community-based agencies, government, and residents throughout southeastern Wisconsin, leading a team that ensured community involvement, the inclusion of local and diverse businesses, and corporate adherence to ethical, environmental, social, and governance practices. Lafayette was also Chief Operating Officer of Prism Technical Management & Marketing Services, LLC, a nationally experienced multidisciplinary management consulting firm based in Milwaukee, where he developed training programs for business owners and corporate internships, managed research projects, and developed and monitored equity and inclusion plans, working for clients like the Milwaukee Bucks, Northwestern Mutual, the Department of Transportation, the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, and numerous other developers, contractors, and governmental entities. In addition to his work for Prism, Lafayette practiced law for a number of years, working to ensure equity for small businesses and nonprofits, and has been an adjunct professor at Marquette University Law School, where his focus was ensuring that law students understand the needs, expectations, and reality of business owners. Lafayette's commitment to professional and community pursuits have been recognized via the Milwaukee Business Journal 40 Under 40 award, the Milwaukee Times Black Excellence Award, the University School of Milwaukee Alumni Service Award, the Titan 100 Award, the Milwaukee Business Journal Power Broker list, and the Foley & Lardner Lyndford Lardner Attorney Service Award. Lafayette is a graduate of Duke University and Duke University School of Law. He also completed the Associates in Commercial Real Estate (ACRE) Program and is a certified Economic Development Finance Professional. He serves on numerous corporate and community-based boards, including Safe & Sound, City Forward Collaborative, the Titan 100 Board, the Salvation Army, Federal Home Loan Bank of Chicago, University School of Milwaukee, Milwaukee College Prep, Harbor District, Menomonee Valley Partners, Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation, and The Water Council.

# BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY SESSION



## **S.R. Mills**

### **CEO, Bear Development**

S.R. Mills is the CEO and a principal of Bear Real Estate Group, a family of companies that includes Bear Development, Bear Commercial, Bear Property Management, Bear Homes, and Construction Management Associates (CMA). Each company plays a pivotal role in the acquisition, development, construction, and management of residential, industrial, commercial, and master planned communities. Bear's footprint of active projects and real estate holdings extends to more than 20 states, with offices in Kenosha, Madison, Chicago, and Jackson, Wyoming. S.R. joined the Bear Real Estate Group in 2002. Before that, he worked with several technology companies in northern California. He earned his bachelor's degree in finance, investment, and real estate from St. Cloud State University and his master's degree in real estate from Roosevelt University. S.R. holds the Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM) designation and is a past Wisconsin CCIM Board of Directors member. He is an active member of the Mary Lou and Arthur F. Mahone Foundation.



## **Michael Morris**

### **Pre-Construction Director, Walsh Construction**

Michael Morris is an accomplished pre-construction director for the Walsh Group with more than 18 years of expertise in the commercial, heavy civil, electrical, and telecommunication construction fields. He is a proven leader with a track record of successfully managing complex projects across America, optimizing operational and financial performance, and contributing to the overall success of organizational objectives. Michael has worked across multiple markets in the construction industry, including mission critical, electrical transmission lines, bridges and heavy highway infrastructure, high-rise buildings, subway tunnels, marine deep foundations, and combined sewer overflow projects.

# BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY SESSION



## **Aaron Popkey**

### **Director of Public Affairs, Green Bay Packers**

Aaron Popkey is director of public affairs for the Green Bay Packers. In his third decade with the organization, Aaron manages relationships with key stakeholders in the community, including federal, state, and local government and civic officials, as well as regional economic development officials. He also oversees external communications and media relations for all non-football departments. Over the course of his career, Aaron has been involved in many of the organization's major events of the past 30 years, including appearances in Super Bowls XXXI, XXXII, and XLV; the redevelopment and subsequent expansions of Lambeau Field; the development of Titledown, the 50-acre, mixed-use development west of Lambeau Field; and projects that celebrated the Packers' 100th anniversary, including a Midwest Emmy-nominated documentary and an award-winning, four-volume book. A current focus of Aaron's strategic communications work, including through his roles on the boards of directors of the Greater Green Bay Chamber and New North, is to maximize the significant interest in the Packers and Lambeau Field for the benefit of the community, region, and state. The overall goal is to concentrate the energy and convening power of the team to positively impact economic development, as well as attraction and retention efforts of local communities. Aaron's work has been honored with the Friend of Forestry Award from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for sustainability initiatives in 2015, Communicator of the Year Award from PRSA's Northeast Wisconsin chapter in 2016, and the City of Green Bay Mayor's Extra Mile Award for strengthening community partnerships in 2018. In the community, his volunteer work reflects his personal interests in education, health and wellness, and outdoor sports and recreation, including service on the boards of directors of Notre Dame Academy High School, Wello, Bellin Health Foundation, Cellcom Green Bay Marathon, and Bay Nordic Ski Program. The De Pere native earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and received the Ralph Nafziger Award from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication in 2005. Aaron's family includes his wife and three children.



## **Rebecca Villegas**

### **Vice President, Enterprise Compliance, Northwestern Mutual**

Rebecca Villegas currently serves as the department head of Enterprise Compliance and is the Chief Compliance Officer of Northwestern Mutual Investment Services and the Northwestern Mutual Wealth Management Company, where she works with her colleagues to build a compliance culture that earns our clients' trust and creates business value for our field and home office. Rebecca also leads the generational transformation of Northwestern Mutual's downtown campus, including efforts to modernize New North. Rebecca has more than 20 years of financial services industry experience, including 15 at Northwestern Mutual, where she has held positions of increasing responsibility within the Enterprise Compliance department. Rebecca holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Cardinal Stritch University and FINRA series 7 and 24 registrations. Rebecca also holds a Certified Regulatory Compliance Professional (CRCP®) designation from the FINRA Institute at Georgetown University.

# BUSINESS PANEL HIGHLIGHT



## **Moderator - Michael Ward**

### **Vice President, Business and Community Development, WEDC**

Michael Ward joined WEDC in September 2022 as vice president for business and community development. To his work at WEDC, he brings more than 25 years of experience in banking with U.S. Bank and its predecessors. He has held leadership positions in sales management, commercial lending, marketing, sales support, and underwriting—all focused on small business. Helping and learning about small businesses and the communities they support have been his passions for his entire career. He has done volunteer work with a number of groups, including various United Way chapters, the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corp., the Waukesha Redevelopment Authority, and the Waukesha County Economic Development Corp. He is a current board member of BizStarts and the Urban Economic Development Association as well as an active volunteer with Kiva. He also serves as a member of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago's Wisconsin Economic Roundtable. A Madison native, he received his bachelor's degree in economics and a master's degree in business administration from the University of Minnesota. He lives with his wife in Waukesha and has three adult children.



## **Alegra Fowler**

### **Owner, Sweetgrass Behavioral Health - Shawano**

Alegra Fowler, a licensed clinical social worker and proud member of the Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin, is the owner of Sweetgrass Behavioral Health. Alegra has been in the field for over 15 years, with the last 9 years focusing on therapy and techniques to address trauma, anxiety, grief, and depression. Sweetgrass Behavioral Health opened in December 2022 with the goal of helping individuals and families restore hope by finding pathways to resilience and restoring balance in their lives. Alegra feels it's imperative to incorporate culturally appropriate interventions to help people reach their highest healing by providing trauma-sensitive approaches. Her treatment philosophy is that the most successful interventions and outcomes include working collaboratively with clients and their families to identify the treatment plan and approaches that work best for them. Alegra is passionate about caring for people in need and is honored to be a part of their journey toward healing.



## **Efrain Lara**

### **Owner, Lara Associates LLC (dba Milwaukee Pallets) - Milwaukee**

Efrain Lara is the owner of Lara Associates LLC (doing business as Milwaukee Pallet), run alongside his brother, Leonel. After graduating in 1993 with a specialty in manufacturing plastics, Efrain went on to study logistics, purchasing, and supply chain management. He continued his education in business at Stanford University in 2019. Lara Associates was purchased in 2014 and has doubled in employees and revenue since then. Lara Associates LLC (dba Milwaukee Pallets) is the approved wood pallet supplier to many of the Midwest's industry leaders. The business is continuously searching for ways to increase production and at the same time maintain the great quality of its products in order to best serve the needs of its customers. The company is a manufacturer of wood pallets, new, combo, and refurbished grade A and B. Lara Associates LLC is proud to be a family-owned and -operated business centrally located in the Milwaukee area, surrounded by customers and suppliers to ensure the safe and fast delivery of quality products.

# BUSINESS PANEL HIGHLIGHT



## Quinn Long

### Owner, Clearcut Solutions - Wauwatosa

Quinn's introduction to construction came at the age of 9, tearing down a chimney with his father on one of Milwaukee's historic multilevel bungalows. He attended Messmer High School, where he graduated as president of the Class of 2001. In 2003, he joined the Laborers Union, where he got his start in concrete sawing. In 2010, he earned a certification in audio engineering and ran his own recording studio. As a single father with sole custody of his two sons, Moses and Roman, he received his bachelor's degree in business from the University of Phoenix in 2012. In 2019, Quinn decided to use his winning attitude and commitment to success from his past endeavors and start Clearcut Solutions Concrete Sawing and Drilling. Each year he has added a new service, despite starting shortly before the pandemic. Clearcut Solutions is committed to providing commercial and residential service with 100% satisfaction. The company has years of safe experience on projects as large as \$330 million, all the way down to homeowners' DIY projects.



## Fanni Xie

### Owner, Uni Uni Bubble Tea - Appleton

Fanni Xie is a small business owner of a cultural themed bubble tea shop in Appleton. Fanni is a first-generation immigrant and a U.S. Army disabled veteran with a tour in Afghanistan where she served as a behavioral health specialist. She brings a unique blend of perspectives as a veteran, woman, and minority entrepreneur to the field of diversity, equity, and inclusion and small business advocacy. Amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, Fanni's dream of owning a tea shop blossomed, aiming not just to serve delicious bubble tea but to foster cultural education within the community. Her unwavering commitment led her to an entrepreneur program where she crafted a distinctive business plan and secured seed funding, persisting despite financial hurdles and eventually gaining support from the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation. In the year since its establishment, Uni Uni Appleton has garnered recognition and accolades at both local and state levels, quickly emerging as a rising star among local businesses. Fanni's vision goes beyond mere commercial success: She is dedicated to merging her business expertise with social work experience, exemplified by her founding of the Northeast Wisconsin Chinese Association. In her role as CEO and president of the organization, she spearheads initiatives that bridge the Asian American community with local resources in culture, welfare, education, and business growth. Notably, she has organized cultural events such as the Northeast Wisconsin Dragonboat Festival, aimed at providing a platform for minority small businesses to overcome barriers and thrive. Her ultimate goal goes beyond running a business: She aspires to create a space where culture, education, and small businesses harmoniously coexist and flourish together, showcasing her commitment to a thriving, inclusive community.



# PRIMARY SPONSORS

## KEYSTONE SPONSOR



**Jeff Musa**  
Regional President  
People's State Bank



**Suzanne Zwaska**  
Vice President  
Community Affairs Manager  
US Bank

## AWARDS SPONSOR



**Heather Ladage**  
Market President and Publisher  
Milwaukee Business Journal

## EMCEES



**Rashi Khosla**  
Founder, CEO  
MARS Solutions Group



**Tim McMurtry II**  
Executive Director  
Infrastructure Business Development  
The National Association  
of Minority Contractors

# GUEST SPEAKERS



**Alison Prange**

Chief Operating Officer  
MKE 2024 Host Committee  
Republican National Convention



**Farooq A. Mitha**

Director of the Office of Small Business Programs  
Department of Defense



**Jessica G. Cavazos**

Deputy Undersecretary of Commerce for  
Minority Business Development  
U.S. Department of Commerce



**Tom Walsh**

Labor Market Economist  
Office of Economic Advisors

# RESOURCE PARTNERS

MARKETPLACE 2023 is hosted by WEDC Vice President of Business and Community Development Michael Ward; Senior Director of Diverse Business Development Eugene Manzanet, Ph.D.; Director of Diverse Business Development Seyoum Mengesha; Diverse Business Development Senior Manager Francisca Rodriguez; and Events Director Sara Beuthien.

MARKETPLACE was coordinated by Prism Technical Management & Marketing Services LLC (Keesha Jones-Sutton, chief strategy officer, and Noel Starks, senior project coordinator); the Wisconsin Procurement Institute (The Contract Academy, Expo Hall, and buyer meetings); Wisconsin Expo (Expo Hall contractor); and Tri-Marq Communications, Inc. (audio/video production).



MARKETPLACE partners help make this annual event a success by providing valuable guidance, promoting attendance through their networks, supporting awards judging, and more.

African American Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin

American Indian Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin

City of Madison

City of Milwaukee Office of Small Business Development

Dane County

Greater Milwaukee Urban League

Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce

Latino Chamber of Commerce of Dane County

Latino Chamber of Commerce of South Eastern Wisconsin

Madison Black Chamber of Commerce

Milwaukee County

Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation

Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District

New North Inc.

North Central Minority Supplier Development Council

Phoenix Financial Advisors

Small Business Development Center

U.S. Small Business Administration

The Business Council

U.S. Bank

U.S. Commercial Service Wisconsin

U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Administration

Western Dairyland

Wisconsin Black Chamber of Commerce

Wisconsin Chinese Chamber of Commerce

Wisconsin Department of Administration – Supplier Diversity Program

Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority

Wisconsin Indigenous Economic Development Corporation

Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce

Wisconsin Procurement Institute

Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce

Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation

Women's Business Development Center

# AWARD FINALISTS

## OUTSTANDING BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

### ABAXENT LLC

#### Adonica Randall, President

Adonica Randall is president and chief problem solver of Abaxent LLC, a 20-plus-year-old, certified MBE/WBE technology solutions company. With over 40 years of technical and business experience, she has specialized in development of business startups, new services, and process improvement, with experience across a variety of industries, including health care, insurance, manufacturing, and construction. Adonica has served in technical, sales, and management positions at GM, GE Medical Systems, IBM, and AO Smith Engineering Division, as well as founding multiple professional services businesses. Adonica received her master of engineering degree in biomedical/electrical engineering from Marquette University and her bachelor's degree in computer science from Missouri School of Science and Technology.

Adonica is a professor emeritus of Alverno College Business School and is the creator of its degrees in business analytics and computing and information technology. Her sabbatical research was in artificial intelligence and machine learning. Notable service roles include entrepreneur in residence at Marquette University; first vice-chair on the Minority Business Economic Input Committee for the North Central Minority Supplier Development Council; ambassador for the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (Wisconsin); and board member of the National Association of Minority Contractors, African Heritage International, the appointed Wisconsin Automated Vehicle External (WAVE) Advisory Committee, the Enterprising Women Advisory Board, UW-Green Bay's EDI Subcommittee, and UW Erdman Madison Business School. Memberships include Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Women in Technology, Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, Northeastern Wisconsin Manufacturing Association, and the U.S. National Black Chamber of Commerce. She is an author and thought leader who speaks on the future of women and minorities in STEM.



### BEYOND WORDS PRODUCTIONS

#### Jamie Perez, Owner

Jamie Perez is the owner and chief storyteller at Beyond Words Productions, a videography and storytelling company that focuses on creating heartfelt and emotive videos for businesses and nonprofits. Jamie found her way to entrepreneurship after spending six years as a broadcast TV news reporter. She worked in almost every role in the newsroom, but her primary position (and the position where she gained the most storytelling skills) was as a multimedia journalist. In this role, Jamie was a one-person show, from finding the story ideas to filming them, editing them, presenting the story live on air, and writing up the story for the station's website—all on deadline, every day. Originally from California, Jamie worked at the ABC station in Sioux City, Iowa, for two years before moving to Madison's CBS station. She covered political campaigns, interviewed celebrities, reported live in the middle of Midwest blizzards, and told stories on the best and worst days of people's lives. After leaving the industry she thought she would be in forever, Jamie found her way to entrepreneurship and hasn't imagined looking back. Since starting her business two years ago, Jamie's videos have helped nonprofits raise hundreds of thousands of dollars, helped for-profits gain hundreds of thousands of dollars in new lead generation, and helped people hire in a stubborn employment market. Jamie's business motto is: "If a picture says a thousand words, my videos will leave people Beyond Words."



# AWARD FINALISTS

## OUTSTANDING BUSINESS OF THE YEAR



### CAMO CREW JUNK REMOVAL

**Ken Oliver, President**

As president of Camo Crew Junk Removal, Ken Oliver draws on a broad range of experiences that began when, as a teenager, he helped his father run a small trucking business. A native Milwaukeean, Ken initially studied to be an athletic trainer before deciding to join the U.S. Marine Corps. While he was a sergeant serving with the reserve unit out of Madison, and also studying to be a carpenter, his unit was deployed to Iraq. For almost a year, Ken was a squad leader during combat operations for Operation Iraqi Freedom. After his military service, Ken ran a small construction company for several years before launching a career in recruitment, where he oversaw operations for several companies hiring and placing people in engineering and technical positions. As a recruitment professional, Ken managed a large staff, launched several new divisions, and partnered with employers on solutions to their workforce needs. He joined Camo Crew Junk Removal in May 2022. Ken lives with his wife, Angela, and their three children in Brookfield. When he's not at work, he is often involved in activities with his children or his church. He and his family volunteer at a local food pantry and at an organization that matches veterans with canine companions. Ken also serves on the advisory committee of the Center for Veterans Issues.

### OH SNAP! BY SHELL PHOTOGRAPHY

**Rochelle Einsiedel, Owner**

Hey, I'm Rochelle, your storytelling photographer! At OH Snap! By Shell Photography, we create relationships with companies and individuals to become their contract in-house photographer. Our mission is to capture life, history, and experiences—specializing in smiles and always capturing your true authenticity with a vibe! We offer contract photography services, saving businesses time and money and keeping your marketing team off your back for images. You get to do what you love and be stress free. Let us do it—we want that too! At an early age, I noticed that pictures could freeze moments in time and that they made people have all kinds of reactions when they would look at them: happy, sad, excited, uncontrollable laughter, etc. Pictures tell a story—real or even made-up. Pictures show authentic moments, and I love everything about that. In 2021, I started OH Snap! By Shell Photography. It has given me the opportunity to take pictures all over the world, including in Mexico, Dubai, and even Africa! I never even dreamed of getting paid for something I absolutely would do for free. I always wanted to travel the world; who knew it would be through my camera lens? At OH Snap! By Shell Photography, we don't just take pictures. We make connections!!



# AWARD FINALISTS

## OUTSTANDING BUSINESS OF THE YEAR



### **SBS TAX LLC**

#### **Ruth Shibilski, Owner**

Ruth Shibilski is the female owner and founder of SBS Tax LLC, started in 2012 after taking over Ronald Bartsch CPA. She is a 1996 UW-Parkside graduate with a bachelor's degree in accounting and finance and a minor in German. Ruth's business grew exponentially during the pandemic due to her willingness to work with small and midsize businesses, primarily in the service industry, when other firms were turning them away. She worked with her clients to understand whether they qualified for, and then apply for, government relief programs including Economic Injury Disaster Loans, the Paycheck Protection Program, and Employee Retention Credits. During this time, she had to hire staff to help maintain the high level of service

her clients have come to expect from SBS Tax LLC. Her firm offers everything from accounting and bookkeeping to payroll and sales tax filings, along with business and personal tax returns. She and her staff are QuickBooks certified ProAdvisors and maintain all IRS certifications needed to file all tax forms. Ruth is a member of Lake Country Rotary-Hartland. Her firm prides itself on being family-oriented and willing to work around any family issues as they arise. She is a wife of 33-plus years, a mother of three boys (ages 31, 28, and 25), and a grandmother of three (a 13-year-old granddaughter and grandsons ages 4 and 2), with a fourth grandchild due in early February.

### **THE FOSTER LANE**

#### **Sarah Salisott, Founder**

In the heart of Wisconsin, the Foster Lane stands as a beacon of support and inspiration for families seeking to deepen connections and infuse more joy into their lives. Founded by Sarah Salisott, the Foster Lane has emerged as a transformative force in fostering stronger, happier families across the state. Contracted with 20 counties in Wisconsin, the Foster Lane has become synonymous with innovative approaches to family well-being. Striving to foster environments where laughter prevails and stress diminishes, the Foster Lane offers valuable services designed to strengthen the bonds that tie families together.

Recognized for excellence, the Foster Lane proudly received the LGBT Business of the Year award from the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce in 2023. This accolade underscores the organization's commitment to inclusivity and making a positive impact in the lives of diverse families. With a mission to serve all families, the Foster Lane provides services in both English and Spanish, ensuring accessibility for a wide range of communities. As they continue to evolve, there is a steadfast dedication to expanding services and offering resources to those seeking to enhance familial connections. Not only are they offering services in multiple languages, but they are also certified Woman- and LGBT-Owned. Founder Sarah Salisott's vision, leadership, and unwavering commitment to fostering joy have positioned the Foster Lane as a catalyst for positive change in Wisconsin's family landscape. Her passion is helping families laugh more and yell less. When she is not working away on and in the Foster Lane, she can be found dancing with her toddler or driving around chatting with her teen daughters.



# AWARD FINALISTS

## BEST WORKPLACE



### CRAWFORD EVALUATION GROUP

David Crawford and Aimee Sullivan

Crawford Evaluation Group strives to be a workplace that values every individual equally. Medical legal consulting is unique, so we are often teaching new employees our business from day one. We seek to hire people who want to be professionally challenged and consider learning to be an exciting aspect of each workday. We create a culture of excellence through training and support while giving each person an opportunity to be challenged and rewarded. Our work environment is dynamic and busy, yet thoughtful. People are allowed to fail and learn from their mistakes; we all make them. We want every person to be engaged in their role, within our work family and with our customers. In an industry that is often chaotic and stressful, we seek to be a positive influence on those coming to us for advice and service. We desire to be a reassuring voice while providing strong guidance in our consulting. We serve a purpose greater than our own and depend on each other to achieve that purpose. Finally, profit sharing is part of our compensation as a reward and reflection of our stewardship. Lifetime friendships are born here. Our work family often will refer friends and loved ones to work here. Our customers inquire about working here. People enjoy coming to work in our office. We consider all these actions to be a positive reflection of our work family and culture.

### RED SHOES INC.

Lisa Cruz, Founder

With a fierce determination to walk a different path, Red Shoes is a woman-driven, full-service marketing agency in Appleton that offers a comprehensive range of public relations, marketing, and creative services. Founded in 2008 by Lisa Cruz, Red Shoes grows and protects brands by nurturing authentic connections and forming long-lasting partnerships. Red Shoes listens and works to understand clients' goals intimately and then assembles a team of experts tailored to meet clients' unique business objectives—and ultimately delivers results. Over the years, Red Shoes has also become the company organizations large and small call in a time of crisis. From natural disasters to investigations, human resources issues, lawsuits, embezzlement, death, criminal matters, on-the-job injuries, and more, Red Shoes has worked with organizations to tackle many complex issues before, during, and after times of crisis. Red Shoes is proud to have certifications as a Woman Business Enterprise (WBE) and a Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) by the Women's Business Development Center. To learn more, visit [redshoesinc.com](http://redshoesinc.com).



### VENDI ADVERTISING

Kathy van Kirk, Julie Haas, and Sam Przywojski, Owners

Vendi is a full-service, women-owned independent advertising agency in La Crosse. It offers a wide range of services including brand, creative, web development, digital marketing and media, research, video, and photography. Entering its 20th year, Vendi got its start when national ad agency veterans decided they were ready for a change. They wanted to develop client partnerships that foster great work and results. They wanted to create a culture of kindness and creativity. And they wanted to do it from La Crosse—a gem of a town on the Mississippi River with incredible outdoor recreation and natural beauty. The only way to do it was to start their own agency. That turned out to be a pretty good idea. Vendi has grown into the largest agency in western Wisconsin and has built a reputation for great work, measurable results, longstanding client relationships, and a culture of kindness, creativity, and collaboration. Vendi is the recipient of the 2020 Governor's Business Excellence Award.



# AWARD FINALISTS

## THOUGHT LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE

### DEIRDRA "DEE" KENDRIX

CEO, DC Global Group

Deirdra "Dee" Kendrix, a luminary in conscious leadership and an award-winning speaker, is a revered thought leader with an unwavering passion for cultivating authentic spaces of growth and transformation. Boasting nearly two decades of senior leadership and executive expertise, Dee has left an indelible mark on the nation's financial landscape, serving in pivotal roles such as retail bank president, global vice president, and director of inclusion. At the helm of DC Global Group as its visionary CEO, Dee captains a team of Culture Gladiators in this boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development, executive advisory, and organizational culture. C-suite women seeking to embrace their true power turn to Dee's Seen-E-O coaching, while leap-ready companies entrust her to orchestrate the metamorphosis of their organizations into mindful, human-centric workplaces that seamlessly marry top-tier talent with sustained profitability. Renowned for her natural communication finesse, Dee is a transformational speaker, captivating audiences with high-energy keynotes and interactive dialogues. Her presentations transcend industries, taking participants on an engaging journey of practical yet inspiring content, awakening each audience member to proactively embrace change. Dee Kendrix is not just a leader—she is a catalyst for a new era of conscious and impactful leadership.



### SHERRI JORDAN

Founder, Envision the Ladder LLC



Sherri Jordan, MBA, ACC, CCA, is founder and principal consultant of Envision the Ladder LLC, a boutique leadership development consultancy firm that specializes in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Envision was founded out of the need to provide resources to leaders and businesses who aim to grow and become more inclusive. We build on the strengths of our clients to help them achieve their ultimate potential. With over 20 years' experience as a government affairs professional in federal and county government, economic and community development, and real estate, Sherri is passionate about the community, building personal relationships and true transformational change. Her extensive involvement in the community includes volunteering, mentoring, and serving on numerous nonprofit boards of directors. She is a certified coach with the International Coach Federation (ICF) and an adjunct professor at both Mount Mary and Marquette universities. Sherri holds a master's of business

administration degree from Concordia University of Wisconsin and is a member of Professional Dimensions and the Rotary Club of Milwaukee. She is a proud 2022 MARKETPLACE Governor's Business Excellence Award recipient in the thought leadership excellence category.



# AWARD FINALISTS

## CEO OF THE YEAR



### **RASHI KHOSLA**

#### **Founder and CEO, MARS Solutions Group**

Rashi Khosla quit her flourishing corporate career in information technology to pursue her entrepreneurial dreams. Passionate about technology and data, she launched MARS Solutions Group with bootstrap capital and grew it organically to a thriving multi-million-dollar business. Under Rashi's leadership, MARS Solutions Group has earned numerous awards and accolades, including spots on the Inc. 5000 list, the Future 50 list, and several Best and Brightest Company to Work For recognitions. Rashi has also been named to the Women of Influence, Notable BIPOC Executives, and Enterprising Women of the Year lists. MARS Solutions Group has matured and proven offerings in the staffing arena and has successfully diversified into information management services. Under a new initiative called MARS Returnship, Rashi and her team have also launched a passion program to support women who are returning to the workforce after a break in their career. Rashi serves on the boards of the Ronald McDonald House of Charities and the Milwaukee Tech Coalition. She also serves on the Social Committee for I.C. Stars in Milwaukee, an immersive technology workforce training and placement program for promising young adults.

### **ROB PERO**

#### **Founder and CEO, Perodigm Media**

Rob Pero is a Cambridge -based entrepreneur, creative, and advocate. He is the founder and CEO of the indigenous-led media group Perodigm; founder of Canndigenous, the first independent indigenous-owned hemp company in Wisconsin; owner of Ripley Green apothecary; founder of the Indigenous Cannabis Industry Association, the leading advocacy organization promoting indigenous interests in cannabis nationwide; and a founder of the Indigenous Business Group, a nonprofit supporting indigenous-led businesses and economic development in Indian country. Rob is a member of the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians and is committed to honoring his indigenous heritage and Ojibwe roots. Rob values family, support for community, respect for the natural world, and a commitment to doing everything—as the Ojibwe say—“in a good way”.



# AWARD FINALISTS

## DIVERSE BUSINESS CHAMPION OF THE YEAR



### **ANISHA JACKSON**

#### **Supplier Diversity Manager, American Family Insurance Group**

Anisha Jackson is an award-winning supplier diversity manager and holds a bachelor of science degree in international business from Johnson & Wales University. Throughout Anisha's career, she has driven positive business outcomes for several Fortune 500 companies. In her current role as supplier diversity manager for American Family Insurance Group, Anisha is focused on developing a diverse supplier ecosystem that is socially and environmentally responsible. Through every system and initiative Anisha creates, she aims to drive the economic impact necessary to champion dreams and opportunities across all communities so everyone can rise.

### **XI (LUCY) LU LORENTZ**

#### **Founding Partner, Chou & Lu Law LLP**

Xi (Lucy) Lu Lorentz is a founding partner of Chou & Lu Law LLP, which subsequently became Lu Law Office LLC in August 2023. Ms. Lu Lorentz's firm is on a mission to our local and global communities by championing equality, celebrating differences, and supporting the growth of our state that can be a home to all. She has been working in the field of immigration for more than 10 years. Prior to starting her own practice, Ms. Lu Lorentz has already had a successful legal career working with different legal service providers, business entities, and academic institutions. Ms. Lu Lorentz provides immigration services for a wide range of matters at both the national and global levels, assisting foreign workers to maintain or acquire legal status with all types of work visas as well as family-based immigration visas. Ms. Lu Lorentz was selected by Super Lawyer as a Rising Star in November 2022. She was later interviewed by the Capital Times about the importance of providing legal services to the underserved and minority community. Ms. Lu Lorentz works almost exclusively with immigrants and has successfully petitioned for them before the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Department of Labor. In early November 2023, Ms. Lu Lorentz was added by Marquis Who's Who as an honored listee. In addition to English, she also speaks fluent Mandarin and Cantonese. She is licensed to practice law in Wisconsin and New York.



### **JAMES METHU**

#### **Economic Inclusion Senior Specialist, Gilbane Building Co.**

James Methu is an economic inclusion senior specialist for the Milwaukee office of Gilbane Building Co. He supports economic inclusion efforts for the office's projects and community affairs. He brings several years of experience working in and with the public sector. James has built strong relationships with the local diversely owned small business community through experience as a senior business analyst with the City of Milwaukee's Office of Equity and Inclusion and now with Gilbane. James grew up in an entrepreneurial family and is also a real estate developer, community advocate, children's book author, and father. His educational background includes a bachelor's degree in business administration; Securities Investment Licenses 6, 63, 7, and 24; and continuing professional studies in contract compliance.

He is a graduate of the Associates in Commercial Real Estate Program administered by Milwaukee School of Engineering and Marquette University. As an emerging real estate developer, he partnered with firms such as General Capital, Horizon Development, and Cinnaire Solutions to provide affordable housing development solutions to Wisconsin communities. His work in affordable housing generated a \$70 million pipeline of projects in Rock County, La Crosse, and Milwaukee. He has experience with financial services, urban development, the City of Milwaukee's Residents Preference Program, Targeted Business Enterprises, public-private partnerships, and property management. James serves on the board of Community Huddle, a nonprofit organization fostering greater community outreach. In his spare time, James enjoys audiobooks, podcasts, and working out.



# HALL OF FAME

The MARKETPLACE Sponsor Hall of Fame was established to honor companies that have exhibited their commitment to minority-, woman-, and veteran-owned business development through perennial MARKETPLACE sponsorship contributions.



## PREVIOUS INDUCTEES

Associated Bank

AT&T

Forest County Potawatomi Community

Green Bay Packers Inc.

Harley-Davidson Motor Co.

Hartland Information Research

Milwaukee Business Journal

Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation

Northwestern Mutual

PNC Bank

Roundy's Inc.

Town Bank

U.S. Bank

Vanguard Computers

WE Energies

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority

Wisconsin Business Development

# NETWORKING PROGRAM AWARDEE HIGHLIGHTS



## **50 YEARS – DISABLED VETERAN-OWNED**

Platt Construction - Franklin

## **50 YEARS – FAMILY-OWNED**

Central Sheet Metal Works Inc. – Superior  
The Tribute Companies – Hartland

## **25 YEARS – WOMEN-OWNED**

Brickstone LLC – Boscobel  
Brilliance Business Solutions – Milwaukee  
CT Laboratories LLC – Baraboo  
Education Solutions Corp. – New Berlin  
Green Bay Pipe & TV LLC – Green Bay  
Hurtado Zimmerman SC – Wauwatosa  
Karen's Trucking LLC – Durand  
Mustard Seed Marketing LLC – Brookfield  
Profound Solutions Inc. – Sobieski  
SEEK Professionals LLC – Grafton  
Thompson & Associates Wetland Services – South Milwaukee

## **25 YEARS – MINORITY-OWNED**

ATSNUC Inc. – Cascade  
Dairyland Energy Solutions Inc. – Milwaukee  
Excelle Employment Solutions Inc. – Milwaukee  
Hues Services Inc. – Freedom  
PETRA Environmental Consultants Inc. – Wausau  
Sanchez Painting Contractors Inc. – Milwaukee

## **25 YEARS – WOMEN- AND MINORITY-OWNED**

Great Impressions LLC – Milwaukee  
On-Site Inc. – Milwaukee

## **HIGHEST CERTIFIED SPEND**

### **A/E Services**

Kamala Singh, K. Singh & Associates Inc.

### **Construction**

Theophilus Iyasele, Toki & Associates, Inc.

## **SBA WISCONSIN AWARDS**

### **Minority Small Business Champion**

Ayrton Bryan, MKE Black – Milwaukee

### **8(a) Graduate of the Year**

Greta Smith, Great Lakes Power Vac – Pewaukee

### **Veteran Small Business Champion**

Natalie and James Chesebro,  
Your Personal Gardener and Arborist – East Troy

# 2023 BUYERS

MARKETPLACE connects private sector, federal, state, and local buyers with diverse suppliers of products and services.

## **COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

Marquette University  
Medical College of Wisconsin  
Milwaukee Area Technical College  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
University of Wisconsin System Administration

## **CORPORATE/GOVERNMENT PRIME CONTRACTORS**

Advocate Health  
(formerly Advocate Aurora Health)  
American Family Insurance Group  
CG Schmidt  
Chryspac  
JH Findorff & Son  
Gilbane Building Co.  
HGA Architects and Engineers  
Leonardo DRS – NPS  
Michels Corp.  
Oshkosh Defense  
Snap-on Inc.  
U.S. Bank  
Versiti  
WPS Health Solutions

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

City of Milwaukee  
Milwaukee County  
Milwaukee County Zoo  
Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD)  
Milwaukee Public Schools  
City of Wauwatosa

## **STATE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families  
Wisconsin Department of Employee Trust Funds  
Wisconsin Department of Health Services  
Wisconsin Department of Health Services – Lead Safe Homes Program  
Wisconsin Department of Justice  
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
Wisconsin Department of Transportation

## **FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

Beyond Vision – AbilityOne Base Supply Center  
General Services Administration Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization

# 2023 EXHIBITORS

Accurate Digital Solutions  
AREA Greetings  
Associated Bank  
Athletic Rubber Converting  
Backupz Childcare Services  
Best Ed Business  
Better Business Bureau  
Beyond Vision  
Beyond Words Productions  
Blueprint365  
Brandt Molded Marble  
Camo Crew Junk Removal  
Can Do Crew Wisconsin  
Columba Industries Corporation  
Construction Business Group  
Crawford Evaluation Group  
Dane County Office for Equity and Inclusion  
DHC Marketing Group LLC  
Diverse Supply Solutions LLC  
Easterseals Wisconsin  
Everdry Waterproofing  
Fashion, Art, and Teen Entertainment (F.A.T.E.)  
FAVORYT Brand  
Fenrici Brands  
The Foster Lane  
FULLCIRCLE26 Inc.  
GBF Bespoke Balloons and Event Services LLC  
Gerber Leisure Products  
Gilbane Building Company | CG Schmidt  
Global Capital Group LLC  
Great Impressions LLC  
Green Bay Packers  
Greenfire Management Services  
Generation of Excellence Trendsetters  
Ictect Inc.  
IFF  
Institute of Business and Entrepreneurship  
Jake's, A Lakeland Community/Lakeland University  
JNJ Gifts and More  
JP Cullen  
LeafFilter Gutter Protection  
Life Empowered Consulting Services  
L'Shay Nikkol Beauty LLC

MalamaDoe - A Coworking Community for Women  
MARS Solutions Group  
McMurtry Financial Services LLC  
Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation  
Menominee Tribal Enterprises  
Mortenson  
Nelson & Co.  
North Central Minority Supplier Development Council  
Northwest Side Community Development Corporation  
OH Snap! by Shell Photography  
Olympia Granola  
Oshkosh Defense  
Pawstar Inc.  
Peoples State Bank  
Prism Technical  
Professional Advocacy LLC  
Riveter Construction and Engineering  
SCORE Wisconsin  
Sherman Phoenix Foundation  
Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission  
Tootsie's Tea  
TVG-Medula LLC / Chiro One Wellness Centers  
U.S. Bank  
U.S. Commercial Service  
U.S. Small Business Administration  
Vanguard Computers Inc.  
Walsh Construction  
City of West Allis  
Wisconsin Department of Administration - Supplier Diversity  
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection  
Wisconsin Department of Transportation  
Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development  
Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation  
Wisconsin Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve  
Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority  
Wisconsin Indigenous Economic Development Corporation  
Wisconsin Native Loan Fund  
Wisconsin Procurement Institute  
WNOV 106.5  
WRTP/BIG STEP  
Ying's Kitchen Inc.  
ZYN Turmeric Wellness

## Partner Resource Tables

African American Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin  
American Indian Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin  
Ethnic and Diverse Business Coalition  
First American Capital Corporation  
Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce  
Latino Chamber of Commerce of Southeastern Wisconsin  
Legacy Redevelopment Corporation  
Madison Black Chamber of Commerce

City of Milwaukee Office of Equity and Inclusion  
Milwaukee County Community Business Development Partners  
Wisconsin Black Chamber of Commerce  
Wisconsin Chinese Chamber of Commerce  
Wisconsin Latino Chamber of Commerce  
Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce  
Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce  
Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation

# EXHIBITORS MAP

















A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P

74
73
72
71
70
69

66	65	64	63	62
55	54	53	52	51

61	60	59	58	57	56
50	49	48	47	46	45

75	76
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Networking  
Lounge Area

Exhibitor  
Sign-In

77
78

68
67

44	43	42	41	40	39
33	32	31	30	29	28

38	37	36	35	34
27	26	25	24	23

79
80

22	21	20	19	18	17
11	10	9	8	7	6

16	15	14	13	12
5	4	3	2	1

81
82

83
84

85
86



**WE LOVE READING A GREAT WISCONSIN SUCCESS STORY.**

***BUT WE LOVE  
HELPING TO CREATE  
ONE EVEN MORE.***

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation is proud to welcome you to the 42nd annual Marketplace event. WEDC supports diverse businesses with financial and operational assistance, resources, and networking opportunities through our statewide network of other agencies, corporations, and nonprofit minority business associations.



***LOOK FORWARD*** ➤

Learn more about WEDC's Diverse Business Development program.





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# Building a community of possible.



U.S. Bank strives to make a positive impact in the community. That's why we support community events that bring us together for the greater good. When we work together, anything is possible.

U.S. Bank is proud to support the 42nd Annual Governor's Marketplace Conference.

Erin Heaton - Officer  
Small Business Specialist  
erin.heaton@usbank.com | 414.391.6496

Taylor Calvert  
Small Business Specialist  
taylor.calvert@usbank.com | 262.350.9442



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Peoples Small Business Administration loans makes it easy to get the right type of funding faster so you can make more happen.

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Loans up to \$5 million with competitive interest rates

10-year terms on business acquisitions, equipment purchases, debt refinances, and mixed-use loans, including working capital

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## Building meaningful business partnerships

Supplier diversity fosters competition, enhances job creation and generates additional purchasing power in the communities where we do business. We are committed to building meaningful business partnerships with certified minority-, women-, service-disabled- and veteran-owned business enterprises.

[www.wecenergygroup.com/sdi](https://www.wecenergygroup.com/sdi)





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# COMMITTED TO COMMUNITIES. COMMITTED TO DIVERSITY.

As one of Wisconsin's largest construction firms, we believe it is our responsibility to proactively grow our industry and to create meaningful employment opportunities for the people who live in the communities we serve. We support diversity, equity and inclusion; join us as we strive for continuous improvement and help to inspire change.



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We use our financial strength and expertise to improve access to affordable housing options and expand economic prosperity for everyone in Wisconsin. We work collaboratively with others and leverage our collective resources to expand equitable and sustainable housing where people want to live, work, raise a family, and thrive.

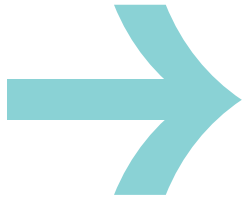
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# SMALL BUSINESS FINANCING FOR WOMEN AND MINORITY OWNED BUSINESSES



## Introducing the Community Uplift Loan Program.

Associated Bank supports minority- and woman-owned businesses throughout the Midwest through our Community Uplift Loan Program. We're proud to help our business customers and their communities grow and succeed.



**Have questions? Contact a relationship manager today.**

### **DAWN MARINO-GRIESBACH**

VP, Small Business Relationship Manager

414-688-9722

[Dawn.Marino-Griesbach@AssociatedBank.com](mailto:Dawn.Marino-Griesbach@AssociatedBank.com)

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1. Subject to credit approval. Foundation Group, LLC is a leading provider of credit solutions to small businesses and is a trusted lending partner of Associated Bank. Loan products are offered by Associated Bank, N.A. or Foundation Group, LLC and involve interest and other costs. Property insurance and flood insurance, if applicable, will be required on collateral.

2. Applications for loans up to \$50,000 may receive an offer in as little as one business day. Applications for loans greater than \$50,000 are subject to extended review periods. Associated Bank, N.A. Member FDIC.



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**MEDC provides responsible, affordable funding to businesses** throughout Milwaukee, Kenosha, Racine, Ozaukee, Walworth, Waukesha, and Washington Counties. We focus on job creation and retention, particularly in underserved neighborhoods and markets.



**How can we help your business? Contact our lending team at 414.269.1440 or visit [medconline.com](https://www.medconline.com).**



**MMSD is proud to support MARKETPLACE Wisconsin and diverse owned businesses.**

**In 2022, MMSD spent \$38M with diverse owned business, or 36% of total contract awards.**



Contact the MMSD Supplier Diversity department at [swmbe@mmsd.com](mailto:swmbe@mmsd.com), to learn more about doing business with MMSD. Visit Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District | Contract and Vendor Management System ([mmsd.diversitycompliance.com](http://mmsd.diversitycompliance.com)) for upcoming opportunities.



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**THE SIGN OF A BETTER BUSINESS.**



**PROUDLY BUILDING THE FUTURE OF WISCONSIN**

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We are committed to forging strong community connections and fostering opportunities. Together, we make a difference.

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## AMERICAN FAMILY INSURANCE'S SUPPLIER DIVERSITY PROGRAM WOULD LOVE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR SMALL AND DIVERSE-OWNED BUSINESS.

American Family Insurance is a proud sponsor of Marketplace W.I.'s mission to support small and diverse-owned businesses in Wisconsin.

Diversity and inclusion reflect our commitment to inspiring dreams. That's why we're helping business owners succeed through the resources of our rapidly growing Supplier Diversity Program.

Find out more at: [AmFam.com/SupplierDiversity](http://AmFam.com/SupplierDiversity)



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