

Excellence in Service (Elected Official)



Rick Blake (Grand Rapids City Councilor): An active member of the CGMC Board, Blake was proactive in reaching out to newly elected legislators to educate them on CGMC issues. He attended several events this year and came to St. Paul to testify on behalf of the CGMC on the need for city-street funding. He also helped inform his community about the need for LGA by penning a guest column in his local newspaper.



Brian Holmer (Mayor, Thief River Falls): As a member of the CGMC Board, Holmer jumped into action this session by urging this local legislators and other lawmakers to support the CGMC's environmental reform proposals. He also actively pushed for solutions to the workforce housing shortage and testified at the Capitol in support of the CGMC/GMNP's workforce housing tax credit proposal.



Dave Smiglewski (Mayor, Granite Falls): A longtime member of the CGMC Board and outspoken advocate for Greater Minnesota cities, Smiglewski is always ready and willing to help whenever the CGMC calls on him. This year, he took a strong leadership role in informing the media and the public about the CGMC's legislative goals by participating in press conferences, radio and newspaper interviews and co-authoring a guest column.



Del Rae Williams (Mayor, Moorhead): As a member of the CGMC Board and co-chair of the Environment Committee, Williams helps lead the CGMC's environmental program. This year, she co-wrote a guest column that helped articulate the need and garner support for the CGMC's regulatory reform proposals. She also attended numerous CGMC events and took action when called upon to help advance Greater Minnesota priorities.

Excellence in Service (Appointed Official)



Pat Hentges (Mankato City Manager): A veteran member of CGMC Board, Hentges he was especially involved in shaping the CGMC's environmental program this year. He led efforts to organize cities in the Minnesota River Basin to bring concerns to the attention of other stakeholders, lawmakers and the MPCA. As co-chair of the Environment Committee, he also co-wrote a guest column that was published in papers across the state.



Jim Thoreen (Brainerd City Administrator): Brainerd re-joined the CGMC this year after a brief hiatus, and Thoreen was instrumental in encouraging his city to come back to the organization. Throughout the legislative session, he was quick to respond to calls to action and was very involved in CGMC events. In addition, he created useful lobbying materials that helped put CGMC issues into context for his community and legislators.

Jack Murray Award



Hal Leland (former mayor, Fergus Falls): During his 14-year career as a city councilor and mayor, Leland was an active CGMC supporter and Board member. He was always willing to lend a hand to the organization, particularly when it came to recruiting new members. Throughout his years in public service, Leland was a strong and dependable leader not only for Fergus Falls, but for all Greater Minnesota cities.

Bob Filson award



Steve Kvenvold (former Rochester City Administrator): Kvenvold, who retired this year after 38 years as the city administrator in Rochester, was a "silent pillar" of the CGMC. Though he was not always at the forefront, his behind-the-scenes contributions are a major reason why Rochester has long been one of the CGMC's most active and engaged members.

President's Award



Sara Carlson (Mayor, Alexandria): As president of the CGMC, Carlson has been a strong and effective leader. Throughout the long and challenging legislative session, she was a persistent advocate and spokesperson for the organization and for all Greater Minnesota communities. A bulldog in disguise, Carlson is always willing to do whatever it takes to advance CGMC priorities.



2017 CGMC Summer Conference Legislative Awards Dinner



August 3, 2017 • Fergus Falls, Minn.

First-Term Legislator of the Year



Sen. John Jasinski (R-Faribault): As a former mayor, Sen. Jasinski came to St. Paul with a keen understanding of the issues that impact Greater Minnesota cities. He hit the ground running by carrying several bills pertaining to CGMC priorities, including Corridors of Commerce, the BDPI program and the Greater MN Internship Tax Credit. An eager and enthusiastic legislator, Sen. Jasinski is quickly making his mark at the Legislature.

Legislator of Distinction - Tax Policy



Rep. Jim Knoblach (R-St. Cloud): As chair of the Ways & Means Committee, Rep. Knoblach has long been a key supporter of LGA. This session, the eight-term legislator was a consistent advocate for increasing LGA funding and continued to be one of the strongest voices in favor of an LGA boost during end-of-session negotiations.



Sen. Erik Simonson (DFL-Duluth): Currently in his first term in the Senate after serving two terms in the House, Sen. Simonson is one of the most ardent supporters of LGA in the Legislature. As an assistant fire chief in Duluth, he understands the importance of the program and continues to fight to strengthen it. This session, he led efforts to add an amendment to the tax bill that would have brought LGA funding back to the 2002 level.



Sen. Bill Weber (R-Luverne): As a former mayor currently serving his second term in the Senate, Sen. Weber is well aware of the critical role LGA plays in keeping rural communities strong. This session, he served as the chief author of CGMC-supported legislation to increase LGA funding. His strong leadership and persistent advocacy helped secure an LGA increase in this year's tax bill.

Legislator of Distinction - Economic Development



Sen. David Senjem (R-Rochester): As chair of the Capital Investment Committee, Sen. Senjem was a key player in crafting a bonding bill that included funding for clean water infrastructure and the BDPI grant program. The fifth-term legislator was proactive in producing a balanced bonding bill early in the session that made critical investments in Greater Minnesota.



Rep. Dean Urdahl (R-Grove City): An eight-term legislator and chair of the Capital Investment Committee, Rep. Urdahl has long been an advocate for boosting economic development in Greater Minnesota by making key investments in infrastructure. This session, he was the chief author of legislation to invest significant funding into clean water infrastructure programs and he led the House's efforts to craft a strong bonding bill.

Legislator of Distinction - Annexation



Sen. Dan Hall (R-Burnsville): As chair of the Local Government Committee, Sen. Hall was instrumental in stopping harmful legislation that would have upended cities' abilities to pursue orderly annexation agreements. The three-term senator took a thoughtful, policy-driven approach to dealing with the situation and went out of his way to truly understand cities' unique needs in regards to land use and annexation laws.

Legislator of Distinction - Transportation



Rep. John Petersburg (R-Waseca): Rep. Petersburg, a third-term legislator, carried CGMC-backed legislation this session to increase funding for the Corridors of Commerce program. As the transportation bill was being shaped, he was instrumental in ensuring that it included cash for Corridors of Commerce—as opposed to bonding funds only—which is needed to cover planning and land acquisition costs.

Legislator of Distinction - Environment



Sen. Kent Eken (DFL-Twin Valley): Sen. Eken worked across the aisle in support of CGMC's environmental reform initiatives this session. A smart and pragmatic leader who is currently in his second term in the Senate after serving five terms in the House, he was a key player in attempts to work with the Governor's Office and the MPCA to broker an agreement on regulatory reform.



Sen. Bill Ingebrigtsen (R-Alexandria): As chair of the Environment Finance Committee, Sen. Ingebrigtsen was a strong supporter of the CGMC's environmental initiatives and made sure they all received hearings before his committee. The four-term legislator continued to fight to include the CGMC's proposals in the environmental bill until the very end of the session.



Sen. Scott Newman (R-Hutchinson): Sen. Newman, who is currently serving his third term in the Senate, was the chief author of CGMC-backed legislation to require independent scientific peer review of new regulations. An active and engaged author, he shepherded the bill through several grueling hearings and helped improve it at every step along the way.



Sen. Carrie Ruud (R-Breezy Point): Sen. Ruud was a leading supporter of the CGMC's environmental initiatives this session. The three-term senator sponsored legislation to make the permitting process easier and more transparent, and led the bill through many hearings to its ultimate passage. She also played a key role in securing the first new funding in more than a decade for two important local parks and trails grant programs.



Rep. Chris Swedzinski (R-Ghent): As a member of the House Environment Finance Committee and the joint House/Senate conference committee, Rep. Swedzinski was a consistently strong advocate for the CGMC's environmental initiatives. In addition, the four-term legislator served as chief author of a bill that passed this session that allows cities more time to review permits and comment on the Impaired Waters List.

Rural Leadership Award



Sen. Paul Gazelka (R-Niswawaukegan): As Senate Majority Leader, Sen. Gazelka has emerged as a powerful champion for Greater Minnesota issues at the Legislature. Currently serving his third term in the Senate, Sen. Gazelka has shown a keen interest in CGMC priorities, particularly LGA and infrastructure. Despite an increasingly busy schedule, he always remains accessible and open to meeting with the CGMC and our members.

Minnesota Legacy Award



Former Sen. Lyle Koenen (DFL-Clara City): During his 14 years in the Legislature, including stints in both the House and Senate, Sen. Koenen was a steadfast supporter of LGA and other CGMC priorities. One of the CGMC's "go-to" legislators, he authored several bills related to LGA and economic development during his tenure. As a member of the Tax Committee, he always fought to protect LGA and the interests of rural communities.



Former Sen. Rod Skoe (DFL-Clearbrook): As a former Tax Committee chair, Sen. Skoe was a powerful ally in the fight to protect and strengthen the LGA program. An 18-year veteran of the Legislature, he was instrumental in developing several economic development initiatives, including the Greater MN Job Training Program, and was a key leader in the LGA reform that passed in 2013.

Friend of the CGMC Award



Jack Zaleski (former Forum Editorial Page Editor): Zaleski retired in 2017 after 30 years of writing editorials for the Fargo-Moorhead Forum. During this career, he took an active interest in CGMC priorities and other issues that affect Greater Minnesota communities, particularly LGA. His blistering editorials had a strong impact on shaping public perception and legislative action.