

Outstanding Employee, Director or Manager of the Year For-Profit Organization

Honors an individual whose vision, dedication, and performance have advanced a for-profit business.

Lisa Biwer (Wilde Gifts and Goods)

Wilde Gifts and Goods is a boutique/gift shop that opened in the fall of 2023. Wilde first opened out of Wilderness Walk Zoo, and has since moved to Main Street! Since moving to Main Street in the spring of 2024, Wilde has become more than just the boutique it started as- it has since become a place where friends and community members gather to shop, attend fun events, network, and maybe make a new friend. Wilde has continuously grown its outreach and services by way of donations and finding new and fun ways to connect with community members and our beloved tourists!

I am proud to nominate Lisa Biwer for Outstanding Employee of the Year (For-Profit) because her dedication, kindness, and work ethic have been instrumental to the success of my business. She consistently goes above and beyond—not only excelling in her role, but also uplifting those around her with her positive attitude and genuine care for our customers and community. Her reliability and creativity has helped my business grow, while her warmth has created an environment where both coworkers and customers feel welcome and valued. Lisa embodies the heart of what my business stands for, and I cannot imagine my team without her passion, loyalty, and hard work.

Chris Hofer (Northern Lakes True Value)

It is with great enthusiasm that we nominate Chris Hofer, Manager of Northern Lakes True Value, for Manager of the Year. Chris has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership, business innovation, and an unwavering commitment to his community, qualities that have elevated Northern Lakes True Value and also made a lasting impact on the broader Hayward region.

Exceptional Leadership: Chris stepped into his role during a pivotal time when the business was poised for transformation. Through a combination of clear vision, strategic planning, and inclusive leadership, he revitalized the store and its culture. He cultivated a supportive workplace grounded in mutual respect, collaboration, and ongoing professional development. These efforts resulted in a high-performing, motivated team.

Under Chris's leadership: - Customer satisfaction has reached new heights. - The store has become one of the top regional performers in both service quality and revenue growth. - Employees feel empowered, valued, and engaged.

Business Growth and Innovation: Chris's entrepreneurial mindset led to the creation of a bold and highly successful concept: the Milwaukee Man Cave, a unique "business within a business" designed to enhance customer experience and drive product sales. From ideation to execution, Chris oversaw every element of its development.

Key outcomes of this initiative include: - A dedicated Milwaukee Tool retail space that draws customers from across the Midwest. - A significant increase in sales and customer engagement. - Elevated brand identity and differentiation within the hardware retail market. The Milwaukee Man Cave has set a new benchmark for specialty retail experiences in the region, showcasing Chris's ability to innovate within a traditional business model.

Commitment to Community: Chris's impact extends far beyond the store. He is a pillar of the local community, actively serving in both civic and charitable roles: - Former Executive Committee member of

the Hayward Area Chamber of Commerce. - Current City Council member, contributing leadership and vision to regional development. - Ongoing support for local charities, fundraisers, and community events, using store resources and partnerships to amplify community efforts. Chris leads with a hands-on, solutions-oriented approach that strengthens the connection between business and community. His actions consistently demonstrate a deep care for people and place, making him not just a manager, but a true community leader.

Conclusion: Chris Hofer exemplifies what it means to be a values-driven, innovative, and community-focused leader. His ability to lead with integrity, inspire those around him, and drive meaningful business and social impact makes him an outstanding candidate for Manager of the Year. We wholeheartedly support his nomination and believe his contributions merit this recognition.

Ariana Johnson (Sweetgrass & Sage/Rugged Roots/The Lot)

I am honored to nominate Ariana Johnson, owner of Sweetgrass & Sage, Rugged Roots, and The Lot for Manager of the Year. In a short amount of time, Ariana has made an extraordinary impact—not only as an entrepreneur but as a community leader and role model.

Through her businesses, Ariana has created welcoming spaces that reflect her values of inclusivity, authenticity, and wellness. Sweetgrass & Sage, Rugged Roots, and The Lot aren't just businesses—they are pillars of community connection, healing, and empowerment.

Ariana consistently goes above and beyond to give back. Whether it's hosting free events, supporting local initiatives, partnering with other small businesses, or offering resources to those in need, she leads with heart and purpose. Her commitment to uplifting others is evident in everything she does.

Ariana's entrepreneurial spirit, community involvement, and deep-rooted passion for service make her not only deserving of this recognition but truly emblematic of what the Manager of the Year award represents.

Jerry Thomas (Lakewood Automotive)

Jerry is a dedicated and loyal employee whose work ethic and leadership have left a lasting mark on the community. He was instrumental in establishing Lakewood Auto and continues to work tirelessly to ensure its success. His commitment to excellence, fairness, and customer service sets him apart—simply put, he's the best.

In the early 2000s, Jerry served as service manager at Chevrolet Don Johnson's in Hayward, where he quickly earned a reputation for fairness and integrity. Customers trusted his judgment, knowing they would be well taken care of, and employees respected his leadership. Jerry kept both his eyes and ears open, listening intently to the needs of those around him and making thoughtful, balanced decisions.

That same dedication continues today at Lakewood Auto, where his loyalty, steady leadership, and commitment to customer care are evident in everything he does. Many continue to choose Lakewood because they know they will receive the same fairness and attention that has always defined his work.

Jerry's legacy is one of trust, fairness, and hard work. He is truly deserving of recognition for his years of service, his instrumental role in building Lakewood Auto, and his unwavering commitment to his team, his customers, and the community.