

2027 Stars Among Us AWARDS

LeadingAge®
Minnesota

Celebrating the People and Programs
Making a Difference

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

ENTRY DEADLINE: MONDAY, SEPT. 28, 2026





2027 Stars Among Us AWARDS

Every day across Minnesota, extraordinary people make a difference in the lives of older adults.

They are caregivers who bring comfort and dignity, volunteers who create meaningful connections, leaders who inspire excellence, and organizations that find new ways to improve quality, safety, and service.

For more than 40 years, the Stars Among Us Awards have celebrated excellence in aging services across Minnesota. They honor the individuals and teams whose dedication shines through in both everyday moments and remarkable achievements.

We invite you to help us recognize these outstanding contributions. Think about the people and programs that make your organization special. Whose story deserves to be told? Who inspires others through their commitment, innovation, leadership, or service?

Award recipients will be recognized at the LeadingAge Minnesota Institute & Expo, February 9-11, 2027.

WHY NOMINATE?

The individuals and programs recognized through the Stars Among Us Award touch the lives of thousands of older adults and families every day. A nomination:

- Recognizes and celebrates excellence.
- Boosts employee and volunteer morale.
- Highlights your organization's culture and values.
- Shares inspiring stories across the aging services field.
- Demonstrates appreciation for those making a difference every day.

RECOGNITION BEGINS WITH A NOMINATION

Every award-winning story starts with someone taking the time to nominate. Take this opportunity to celebrate the stars among us by submitting a nomination.

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

WHAT MAKES A STRONG NOMINATION?

The strongest nominations tell a story and demonstrate impact.



CAREGIVER OF THE YEAR

LeadingAge Minnesota's
HIGHEST HONOR

Honors direct and support service caregivers who go beyond expectations to greatly enhance the quality of life for seniors and their communities.



For this award, the selection committee looks for:

- Compassionate service that enhances the lives of older adults
- Actions that consistently go above and beyond expectations
- Meaningful impact on residents, clients, families, or team members
- Stories that demonstrate extraordinary dedication to care and service

Eligibility: Any staff person who has direct contact with residents or serves in a supporting role.

Caregiver awards are given at the state level and for each LeadingAge MN district.

The Statewide and District Caregiver Award recipients also receive a monetary gift from the Gayle Kvenvold Commitment to Caregivers Fund of the LeadingAge Minnesota Foundation.



INDIVIDUAL AWARDS



Recognizes the commitment, contributions, and impact of a person in their first three years at their organization/community.

For this award, the selection committee looks for:

- Exemplary commitment and passion for serving older adults
- Meaningful contributions that have made a clear difference for residents, clients, colleagues, or the organization
- Specific examples that show how the nominee has distinguished themselves within their first three years at the organization
- A compelling explanation of what makes this person a rising star and what sets them apart from others

Eligibility: Person in any role or level in their first three years at a member provider organization (current work location).



Honors a volunteer or volunteer group whose commitment and dedication enhance the quality of life for seniors and their communities.

Volunteer awards are given at the state level and for each LeadingAge MN district.

For this award, the selection committee looks for:

- Exceptional dedication through volunteer service
- Meaningful contributions that enrich the lives of older adults
- Initiative, generosity, and reliability
- Lasting impact on residents, clients, or the community

Eligibility: Any person or group who has volunteered at a member provider organization in 2026.



Celebrates an older adult who embodies vibrant aging.

For this award, the selection committee looks for:

- Active engagement in community life
- Positive influence on others
- A vibrant approach to aging
- Inspiring examples of purpose, connection, and contribution

Eligibility: This award is open to any resident, tenant, client, or participant of a LeadingAge Minnesota member community.

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP

Honors a person whose leadership is demonstrated through vision, servanthood, mentoring others, and commitment to older adults.

For this award, the selection committee looks for:

- Leadership demonstrated through vision, integrity, and service
- Commitment to improving the lives of older adults
- Ability to mentor, motivate, and inspire others
- Examples of leadership in action and measurable impact

Eligibility: Regardless of title, role, or tenure, the leadership award is open to people in any service setting, at any level of the organization.

BOARD TRUSTEE OF THE YEAR

Recognizes a board member of a provider organization whose service, commitment, and actions have supported the organization in its mission and service to older adults.

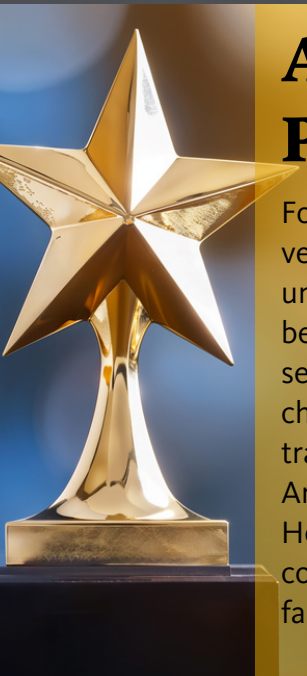
For this award, the selection committee looks for:

- Strong commitment to mission-driven governance
- Meaningful contributions to organizational success
- Leadership that advances services for older adults
- Thoughtful stewardship and engagement as a board member

Eligibility: Any board member who served in 2026.



2026 Statewide Caregiver of the Year:



ANNETTE RIESTENBERG, RN PERHAM LIVING

For nearly four decades, Annette Riestenberg has exemplified the very best of caregiving. Known for her compassion, advocacy, and unwavering commitment to residents and families, she goes beyond meeting needs to honor each person's story, dignity, and sense of purpose. Whether helping a resident maintain a cherished identity, supporting families through difficult transitions, or mentoring the next generation of caregivers, Annette brings warmth, wisdom, and grace to every interaction. Her impact extends far beyond clinical care, creating meaningful connections and enriching the lives of countless residents, families, and colleagues throughout her remarkable career.



JOIN A DISTINGUISHED GROUP OF HONOREES

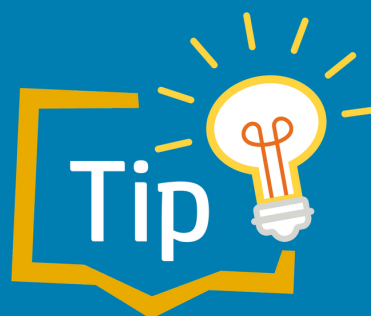
Each year, Stars Among Us recipients represent the very best of aging services in Minnesota. Their stories are celebrated across the LeadingAge Minnesota community and inspire excellence throughout the field.



Who Will You Nominate?

- A caregiver who consistently goes above and beyond?
- A volunteer who brightens lives every day?
- A resident who inspires others through active engagement?
- A new employee making an immediate impact?
- A leader who empowers others to succeed?
- A program that is transforming care or operations?

THINK BEYOND JOB TITLES.
THINK ABOUT IMPACT.



**DON'T OVERLOOK
EVERYDAY
EXCELLENCE.**

Stars Among Us Awards celebrate contributions at every level of an organization. Some of our most inspiring nominees are the people whose quiet dedication makes a difference every day.

**If someone came to mind,
nominate them today.**

ORGANIZATIONAL AWARDS – EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

The Excellence in Practice awards celebrate the great work your organization is doing. They serve as a platform to recognize and share promising programs and initiatives with other LeadingAge Minnesota members to help advance and transform the way we serve older adults.



Eligibility: These awards are available to any provider organization and are intended to be self-nominated in any of the categories listed below. An organization may submit multiple nominations.

WHAT MAKES A STRONG NOMINATION?

The strongest nominations clearly demonstrate impact, measurable outcomes, and lessons that can benefit other providers.

EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE – INNOVATION

The selection committee looks for:

- A new or unique approach to a challenge or opportunity
- Clear purpose and measurable outcomes
- Creative thinking that advances aging services
- Potential for replication by other organizations

EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE – QUALITY OF LIFE

The selection committee looks for:

- Programs or practices that improve resident or client well-being
- Demonstrated positive outcomes and impact
- Meaningful enhancement of daily life and engagement
- Ideas that other organizations can learn from and adopt

EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE – RESIDENT SAFETY

The selection committee looks for:

- Effective strategies that improve or ensure resident safety
- Evidence of measurable results
- Thoughtful implementation and evaluation
- Practical approaches that can be replicated elsewhere

EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE – WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The selection committee looks for:

- Successful efforts to recruit, retain, or engage staff
- Positive impact on workplace culture
- Measurable outcomes related to workforce goals
- Strategies that could benefit other providers

EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE – OPERATIONS

The selection committee looks for:

- Process improvements that solve a meaningful challenge
- Increased efficiency, effectiveness, or organizational performance
- Clear outcomes and demonstrated results
- Practical ideas that can be adapted by other organizations

SHARING YOUR SUCCESS

Excellence in Practice Award recipients are asked to share their winning programs at the 2027 Institute & Expo as a 20-minute presentation with an emphasis on demonstrating what other organizations can learn from their experience and/or adopt or replicate the practice.

2026 Excellence in Practice Award:



CASSIA – DE-ESCALATION CHAMPIONS TRAIN-THE-TRAINER PROJECT

When caregiver safety is strengthened, everyone benefits. Cassia's De-escalation Champions Train-the-Trainer Project equips staff to confidently respond to challenging situations and reduce workplace violence. Supported by a Minnesota Department of Health grant, the initiative strengthened onboarding and ongoing education across 43 sites, creating a safer workplace where caregivers feel more prepared, confident, and better equipped to provide exceptional care.

RECOGNITION BEGINS WITH A NOMINATION

Award Recipient Recognition Includes

- Celebration at the LeadingAge Minnesota Institute & Expo
- Professional recognition among peers statewide
- Media and community recognition opportunities
- Commemorative award and certificate
- Feature stories and videos for select recipients

Every nominee receives a formal recognition certificate for their contributions because excellence deserves to be celebrated.



HOW TO NOMINATE

First, access the [Nomination Guide](#) for complete award information, eligibility requirements, nomination instructions, criteria specific to each award, and tips for preparing a strong submission. When you are ready, [submit your nomination online](#).



Questions – Awards@LeadingAgeMN.org

TIPS FOR A WINNING NOMINATION

- Share specific examples and stories
- Include measurable impact whenever possible
- Describe how the nominee goes above and beyond expectations
- Use quotes from residents, families, or colleagues that help the selection committee know what makes your nominee special
- Focus on outcomes, not just responsibilities
- Gather letters of support from people other than the person making the nomination

TIMELINE – KEY DATES



Nominations Open: July 2026 →
Deadline: September 28 →
Recipients Notified: November 2026
→ Awards Celebration: Tuesday,
February 9, 2027, in St. Paul, MN

Entry Deadline: 11:59 p.m., Monday, Sept. 28, 2026