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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RECIPIENTS OF WDM CHAMBER DEI EXCELLENCE AWARDS ANNOUNCED

WEST DES MOINES, IA (THURSDAY, SEPT. 2, 2021) – Yesterday, Wednesday, September 1, the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce (WDM Chamber) held its inaugural Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Workplace Excellence Awards (DEI Awards) presented by [Wells Fargo](#). It was a night full of learning, growing and celebrating the work being done to make the region more inclusive. 12 awards were given out to the following organizations/individuals:

- Small Business (1 – 49 employees): **MWH Law Group LLP**
- Medium Business (50 – 249 employees): **Merchants Bonding Company**
- Large Business (250 and above): **Hy-Vee, Inc.**
- Nonprofit: **Oakridge Neighborhood Services**
- Government: **Small Business Administration**
- Education: **Des Moines University**
- DEI Leader of the Year: **Dr. Rich Salas**
- DEI Emerging Leader of the Year: **Jamon Harrell**
- DEI Student Leader of the Year: **Ruffin Tchakounte, student at DMU**
- DEI Ally of the Year: **Connie Wimer**
- Best Inclusion Initiative: **Sammons Financial Group; Faith & Grace Garden**

These award recipients were selected from a pool of 38 applicants by a panel of judges who come from all walks of life. That panel of judges included:

- Lindsay Cannaday, United Way
- Lonnie Dafney, EMC Insurance
- Dr. Anthony Ferguson, West Des Moines Community School District
- Renee Hardman, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Iowa
- Sean Kennedy, IMT Insurance
- Tina Mowry Hadden, American Equity
- Henny Ohr, EMBARC
- Sanjita Pradhan, Iowa Asian Alliance
- Courtney Reyes, One Iowa
- Karen Rieck, FBL Financial
- Bobbi Segura, Women Lead Change
- Armel Traore dit Nignan, CultureALL
- Lindsey White, African American Leadership Academy

Additionally, Ruffin Tchakounte, the Student Leader of the Year, received a \$1,550 scholarship for his education and Oakridge Neighborhood Services, the nonprofit winner, gets to select a minority leader to go through the West Des Moines Leadership Academy on a full-ride tuition

scholarship. These scholarships are possible thanks to the Minority Leader Scholarship Sponsor, American Equity.

“Inclusion is an important part of creating a growing corporate culture at American Equity,” said DEI Awards Chair Anant Bhalla, American Equity President and CEO. “It allows us to have different points of view in the way we work and the way we make decisions; allowing people to speak up and to inspire innovation from all parts of the company.”

The WDM Chamber was also able to donate a portion of sponsorship proceeds that totals \$5,225 to [Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Iowa](#) to support their mission of creating one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth.

A special thank you to the event MC Jen Carruthers with 11 Eleven Productions, PR Partner Hanser & Associates, and Primary Source for generously donating all the awards.

An additional thank you to sponsors:

Presenting Sponsor: [Wells Fargo](#)

Minority Leader Scholarship Sponsor: [American Equity](#)

Award Partner – Gold Sponsors: EY, [Polk County Board of Supervisors](#), [NCMIC](#)

Advocate Sponsor: [Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority \(DART\)](#)

Champion Sponsors: [American Enterprise](#), [Care Initiatives](#), [IMT Insurance](#), [Merchants Bonding Company](#), [Sammons Financial Group](#), [Simpson College](#), [Turner Construction](#)

Corporate Partner: [Farm Bureau Financial Services](#)

Thank you as well to the DEI Award Partners who do great work every day for the community: [Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Iowa](#), [the West Des Moines Community Foundation](#), [One Iowa](#), [the Office of Latino Affairs](#), [Women Lead Change](#), [Iowa Queer Communities of Color Coalition](#), [CultureALL](#), [the Association of Iowa Latinx Professionals](#), [EMBARC](#), [Iowa Asian Alliance](#), [United Way](#), [Black Urban Professionals](#), [the African American Leadership Academy](#), and [The Directors Council](#).

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About the WDM Chamber of Commerce

The mission of the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce is to champion all things West Des Moines by strengthening our area companies, providing personalized resources and attracting a top workforce to position WDM as the best suburban city in America. With 700+ members, we provide something for everyone. Learn more about the chamber and how to get involved at [wdmchamber.org](#).