



# Inspiring tomorrow's local leaders

## MTA awards annual Robinson Scholarship

**A** dedicated public servant, aspiring planner seeking to help shape communities, and a student looking to make a difference through public administration are this year's MTA Robert R. Robinson Memorial Scholarship recipients.

Each scholarship winner has strong ties to their community, and a deep desire to continue to give back to Michigan residents through public service.

### 'Striving for efficient local government'

Serving as **Harrison Charter Township** (Macomb Co.) deputy supervisor for the past four years has given **Joseph Aragona** an up-close view of the value, opportunities and challenges of the government closest to the people.

Aragona, who also served a term as **Clinton Charter Township** (Macomb Co.) trustee, will graduate from Michigan State University next May with a master's degree in business



Aragona

administration—which he intends to put to work continuing to serve local government and his state.

With aspirations to serve in the state Legislature, and long-term career goals of local government management, Aragona has his sights set on making a difference.

In addition to serving on Harrison Charter Township's economic development committee, beautification committee and pension board, Aragona has also volunteered for the Clinton Township Goodfellows, Kiwanis and Gratiot Cruise Committee. He values creating quality of life and giving back to residents—and know the impact that local government has.

Assisting residents with infrastructure improvements was the topic of Aragona's scholarship application essay, which

# feature

delved into sewer lead failures and ways to help resolve the issue.

“[A] lack of knowledge by homeowners, the high cost of repair and the shortcoming of homeowners insurance means that this problem can become devastating to homeowners in lower income neighborhoods in a very short period of time,” he wrote. “This situation will continue to get worse throughout the state. One of the best remedies would be an ongoing special assessment district [SAD]. This district would be limited to and defined as only residents who have sewer lead failure, and who opt into district agreement.

“Unfortunately, this type of SAD is not permitted under Michigan law. The Legislature should act to allow townships the ability to pass this type of SAD, which will improve neighborhoods and give relief to lower income residents.”

Aragona’s commitment to and knowledge of local government runs deep. As the Harrison Charter Township Board noted in its resolution of support for his scholarship application, “Deputy Supervisor Aragona volunteers his time in support of the community ... [and] works full time at the township, striving for efficient local government and is constantly trying to improve himself. [His] tasks at the township include coordinating human resources issues, managing the Assessing, Building, Fire, and Water and Sewer Departments, and he has gained an intimate understanding of how these departments run.”

## ‘Passionate about making great places to live’

After **Jessica Hobbs** completes her master’s of urban and regional planning from the University of Michigan (U of M) in 2024, she has her sights set on consulting with local governments to make a difference in the lives of residents. Throughout her academic and volunteer experiences, she has brought a deep interest for the arts and recreation to promote



Hobbs

community health. Her future ambitions include serving on a township or city planning commission to help nurture those passions for the greater good.

“I am passionate about making Midwestern townships and cities great places to live,” she said. “The state of Michigan offers opportunity for development, the possibility of climate-safer neighborhoods and communities, and many precious natural resources to both enjoy and protect for future generations. I believe many of the great things about our state reach residents at the local level and I am excited to be able to help residents from all backgrounds, income levels and regions better access all that our state has to offer.”

Receiving the scholarship from MTA will allow her to continue her endeavors to make serve Michigan and its residents. “The scholarship will allow me to be even more engaged with the University of Michigan’s opportunities and programs,” she said.

Hobbs drew on her U of M undergraduate degree in sustainability for her scholarship essay, which explored the impact of local regulations on biodiversity. “Many townships and cities have regulations on what lawns can look like, often resorting to short grass length, manicured to suit outdoor activity,” she wrote. “We now know that longer grass lengths, wildflowers and pesticide-free growth promote a healthy level of biodiversity that is necessary for species survival. Local governments must balance the recreational needs and desires of residents with the critique of the landscaping status quo.”

## ‘To help and serve others’

A commitment to serving community—particularly youth—inspired scholarship recipient **Serena Kruithoff** to pursue her degree in nonprofit and public administration from Grand Valley State University (GVSU). After graduation next spring, she aims to find a career giving back to the greater Grand



Kruithoff

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Rapids area, including her hometown, **Plainfield Charter Township** (Kent Co.).

“I have always wanted to use this degree to help and serve others in my community,” said Kruihoff, who has volunteered in both her home township as well as **Allendale Charter Township** (Ottawa Co.), where GVSU is located. “I would also love to lead within the community in any way possible.”

With a degree emphasis on community planning and development, Kruihoff has used the knowledge she has garnered in the classroom in communities both close to home and in other states, including through service trips helping those in need. She similarly tackled a critical topic of residents in need in her scholarship essay, writing about water contamination. “Any contamination of [local] waterways can heavily affect the health of the population,” she wrote. “The area I live in has had high levels of PFAS contamination, which overall leads to unsafe drinking water. I have seen my neighbors struggle, and I think it is time for a change.”

Kruihoff aims to be part of that change—and receiving the Robinson Scholarship will help her accomplish that goal. “It means that I can continue to work hard in my classes and achieve my goals this coming school year,” she said. “I am just so beyond thankful for the opportunity to have been selected for this award. It has inspired me to believe in myself, and work even harder.”

## Support Michigan’s future leaders

MTA’s second executive director, Robert R. Robinson was dedicated to townships and to furthering the form of government closest to the people. MTA established a memorial scholarship in Robinson’s honor after he passed away in 1987.

Robinson dedicated much of his life to township government. In addition to his eight years as MTA executive director, he served for six years as MTA’s legislative director, and was a cofounder and board member of the National Association of Towns and Townships, including two years as president. He spent a decade as **Meridian Charter Township** (Ingham Co.) supervisor before joining MTA in 1969. Awarding this endowment each year in his name helps to ensure that Michigan’s future local leaders continue to value and protect township government and the Michigan residents it serves.

Township officials and MTA county chapters can help ensure that we are able to continue supporting the educational pursuits of tomorrow’s township leaders by making a donation to support the scholarship fund. “The scholarship fund is critical both to students in pursuit of their local government careers, and to all public officials as we work to encourage today’s students to pursue a future in public service,” said Robinson Scholarship Committee Member **Harold Koviak**, MTA treasurer and **Burt Township** (Cheboygan Co.) supervisor.

Contributions are tax deductible. Checks payable to the Robert R. Robinson Memorial Scholarship Fund can be sent to MTA, PO Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078. Learn more about the scholarship on at [www.michigantownships.org/scholarship.asp](http://www.michigantownships.org/scholarship.asp), or call (517) 321-6467 with questions.

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