



Inspiring tomorrow's local leaders

MTA awards annual Robinson Scholarship

Dedicated public servants looking to further broaden their service to their community and a student aspiring to enhance residents' ability to enjoy outdoor public spaces are this year's MTA Robert R. Robinson Memorial Scholarship recipients.

The scholarships are presented annually to a junior, senior or graduate student enrolled in a Michigan college or university seeking a career in local government. Each of this year's scholarship winners has strong ties to their community, and a deep desire to continue to give back to Michigan residents through public service.

'Pride in community'

In the nearly 10 years since **Melissa Raikes** first joined the staff of **Northville Charter Township** (Wayne Co.), her overall goal has not changed. "I have worked in many different departments, but the goal has been the same," she said. "To serve the community to the best



Raikes

of my ability, and to provide safety and quality services through programs and policies to residents."

After five years as a finance associate, Raikes made the move to the township public services department, helping to process permits and zoning board of appeals applications. She has been a water and sewer associate for the past year, assisting with budget administration, grant research and applications, customer service, and more.

Raikes was "thrilled" to be chosen as one of this year's scholarship winners, she said, adding, "winners of this scholarship need the support of their township board. This is a great validation of support from Northville Township leadership to encourage and assist in helping to further my goals and use the skills I'm learning to serve my community."

Her experiences in the township led Raikes to seek a master's in Business Administration from Wayne State University, Mike Ilitch School of Business, with an ultimate goal of serving as a finance director in a Michigan community. "The need to help people is probably written into my DNA," she said. "I've always been drawn to helping people. At the local government level, you have the most impact on people's lives. When local government listens and works with their citizens, they can make changes to ordinances, policies and procedures that serve the community."

In addition to her role in the township, Raikes also serves as president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 1410 Council 25 Union, and is a Girl Scout leader and board of finance member at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Northville.

Each scholarship applicant must submit an essay on an issue of importance to local government. Raikes tackled a critical topic affecting municipalities across the state and nation: workforce development. "Over the last few years, our social, work and personal environments have seen dramatic change brought on by the pandemic," she wrote. "We faced these items by trial and error, while continuing to provide services to our community. ... How do local governments proceed with maintaining and growing a good workforce to continue to serve the public and grow their communities?"

"In short, local governments need to develop a brand, have their employees take pride in [their community], and give employees the tools needed to grow community relationships by education, networking and organizational opportunities."

'I aim to foster a stronger sense of unity'

Jerrid Burdue has spent his professional career helping to build community. Working for several years as a planner for the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, Burdue is now a neighborhood business and projects coordinator for the City of Kalamazoo. He has his sights set on a career as a municipal



Burdue



manager, and is seeking a master's in Public Administration, with a concentration in public management, to help that goal become a reality.

"I'm drawn to a career in local government and public service because I genuinely believe that good can come from local units of government," Burdue said. "Every decision they make impacts our lives, whether it's through built design or policy that reshapes how we get things done. I believe that with my skills and understanding, I can help make local government more efficient and more inclusive for everyone. It's also important to me that government steps up, learns from its past mistakes, and works hard to make life better for every resident. That's why I'm so passionate about playing a part in this process."

Time serving as vice chair on the city's zoning board of appeals allowed Burdue to contribute to important decision-making processes, he said, adding, "I developed a deep understanding of the regulatory aspects within local governance." In addition, in 2022, he was appointed as a board member for the revitalized Douglas Neighborhood Association, allowing him to actively contribute to the development and enhancement of the community. "Through my involvement, I aim to foster a stronger sense of unity, empower residents, and advocate for positive changes that enhance the overall quality of life in the neighborhood," said Burdue, who is a member of the Michigan Association of Planning.

"It's an honor to receive this scholarship, especially with the support of **Howard Township** (Cass Co.), the community I grew up in," Burdue said. "This scholarship takes me one step closer to finishing my master's of Public Administration. With this degree, I'll be better equipped to make real, impactful changes in local government."

In his scholarship essay, Burdue reflected on the critical importance of broadband internet access to communities, businesses and residents. "Thousands of households across the state lack fixed internet connections at home with minorities, low-income [residents], and seniors most likely to not have access," he wrote. "Research has shown that access has improved community health and educational outcomes, the ability to interact with government services, and promotes community and economic development."

"Each community is different and there is not a one-size-fit-all broadband approach. Some communities may find through extensive public engagement that municipal-owned and operated service proves to be the best choice. Others may find that they lack the capacity or expertise to run their own network and find forming a public-private partnership with strong oversight to be best. Others yet, especially rural communities, may find that already existing electric cooperatives can expand into the broadband space."

'Reconnecting people and nature'

A love of nature and a commitment to community have helped shape future aspirations for Madison Moran, who will graduate from Lake Superior State University with a degree in Fisheries and Wildlife in May 2006. Moran aims to use her degree—and her passion for the outdoors—to create safe public spaces for both residents and wildlife to grow and thrive.



Moran

"I have always been very passionate when it comes to the outdoors," Moran said, noting that she is very thankful for being named a scholarship recipient. "College is helping me gain the knowledge I need to connect people with nature. I hope to improve parks and help preserve rural neighborhoods."

Moran has spent the last four years as an intern with **China Charter Township** (St. Clair Co.), which has given her an up-close view of the many impacts that local government has on its residents and the greater community. In addition to her internship duties, Moran also worked as an election worker and was appointed as a parks and recreation committee member.

This experience, and China Charter Township's efforts to safeguard its rural character, further enforced Moran's desire to protect and preserve Michigan's outdoor resources for today's families and future generations. "I love nature and thrive in it," she said. "It's [my] goal to reconnect people and nature."

Support Michigan's future leaders

Robert R. Robinson, MTA's second executive director, 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 second vice president 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, or call (517) 321-6467 with questions.

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