



Inspiring tomorrow's local leaders

MTA awards Robinson Scholarships

The three recipients of the 2019 MTA Robert R. Robinson Memorial Scholarship share a desire to make a positive difference in their communities, for finding solutions and meeting the needs of all residents, including those who may often get overlooked.

Students, inmates and the poor are mentioned in their scholarship applications and the accompanying essays on issues impacting local government. The 2019 recipients of the Robinson Scholarship—a one-time scholarship awarded to a junior, senior or graduate student enrolled at a Michigan college or university who is pursuing a career in local government—are the new voices for future leaders who will guide our communities and state. It is inspiring and MTA is proud to award each of them with this scholarship.

'I want to be that helping hand'

Alyssa Platte, a senior at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in **Allendale Charter Township** (Ottawa Co.), is hoping to use her upcoming degree in social work to make a difference. Her dream is to work in the state Department of Corrections, helping inmates about to be released to receive the necessary direction and support to rejoin society and become a positive member of their community.

She sees this help first taking place with therapy, helping each inmate who passes her desk to find the right treatment

plan that will help them grow beyond both the mental and physical cell holding them. She also sees the role helping a newly released inmate find housing, employment and further mental health treatment, if needed.

“I went to school for social work,” Platte said. “I want to be able to help families and children become connected with resources that are going to eliminate barriers. I want to be that helping hand in any way possible.”

Platte was inspired to take her future career in this direction during one of her undergraduate internships. One of the cases she was working on had a father who was incarcerated. Hearing the father’s story and experience inspired her.

In addition to working toward her goals of helping the greater community through inmate outreach, Platte has also been involved in her home township, **Westphalia Township** (Clinton Co.). She assisted in township elections, and has volunteered with office and building maintenance, from filing to landscaping. In addition, she was a student assistant for the Michigan Secretary of State and a Red Cross volunteer—building a resumé of making a positive difference in the lives of Michigan residents.

Platte’s scholarship essay took on the controversy around the possible closing of Benton Harbor High School. Just this summer, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer discussed the possibility of closing the high school, but more recently new Michigan Superintendent Michael Rice argued for it to remain open. In her essay, Platte gave a strong argument for keeping the school open, taking a personal approach—the impact of the closing on the students and their families.

“The students who are currently attending the institution would be forced to enroll at an alternative location,” she wrote. “This would create issues for the families involved due to the potential transportation conflicts.”

She dived further into these problems, from increased classes sizes to extracurricular activities. “Additionally, it is not guaranteed that the struggling student from Benton Harbor High School would thrive any more at a neighboring institution. ... The issue does not seem to be approached in a matter that would assist in eliminating poor education.”

Platte concluded her essay with recommendations for not only keeping the school open, but making productive changes that could benefit everyone, most importantly the students.

‘Townships encompass my whole life—and I love it’

Katarina Kusmack is planning to make a name for herself in her local township. She has been deputy supervisor for **Decatur Township** (Van Buren Co.) since 2017, and also serves as planning commission chair and on the zoning board of appeals. Her long-term goal, she said, is to serve as Decatur Township clerk. In fact, she plans to run for the position of clerk in the next election, with the assistance and guidance of the current clerk.

In addition to her work in the township, she is also pursuing a degree in Business Law from Western Michigan University.

Help support Michigan’s future leaders

As 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 Association 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 to help 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 Chair **Harold Koviak**, MTA District 4 director and **Burt Township** (Cheboygan Co.) supervisor. “Without these funds, it is that much harder for the students to achieve their goals.”

As a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, all contributions are tax deductible. Checks may be sent, payable to The Robert R. Robinson Memorial Scholarship Fund, to: Michigan Townships Association, PO Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078.

Learn more about the scholarship on MTA’s website, at www.michigantownships.org/scholarship.asp, or call (517) 321-6467 with any questions.

Kusmack gets a front row look at township issues in her role as part-time receptionist and legal assistant with the Kalamazoo-based law firm Bauckham, Sparks, Thall & Seeber, PC—which has served as MTA’s legal counsel since its inception in 1953. As she noted in her application, “I love that I can have the interaction with my own township, while understanding and working with the law behind what I do in the township. I like to say that townships and their law encompass my whole life, and I love it.”

In her scholarship essay, Kusmack focused on the importance of community awareness and its impact on local governments.

“I believe awareness is a major issue affecting our local governments because of the amount of residents who cannot even say what township they live or name one board member, let alone know what happened at the most recent board meeting,” she wrote. “In a world of instant gratification,

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it is hard to get residents to show up to any local event or function if it does not explicitly affect them.”

She believes communication is the key to this problem, recommending that townships seek out new ways to share and communicate with the public.

“*What* inspires me comes from *who* inspires me,” Kusmack said. “Hard work, dedication, and loyalty inspires me. These traits help me to continue to work on my goals everyday, no matter how long and hard the days can be,” noting that her parents, the attorneys at Bauckham Sparks and the elected officials of Decatur Township “have all shown me the importance of these traits and that they are what can get you through anything.”

‘Very grateful, very thankful’

Rachel Rose Briggs has her sights set on a career that allows her to help set policy regarding the safety and public welfare of local citizens. As a junior pursuing a degree in public health administration at Saginaw Valley State University, she is already debating and discussing local policy issues.

In her scholarship essay, Briggs discussed an upcoming ballot issue on the creation of a dangerous building ordinance





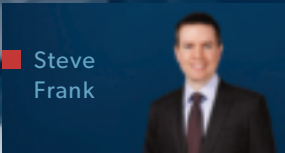
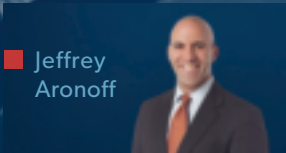


in her hometown, **Montrose Township** (Genesee Co.).

“The creation of the dangerous building ordinance is designed to promote the health, safety and welfare of the people in Montrose Township,” she wrote. “It will help regulate the maintenance and safety of certain buildings and structures deemed dangerous.”

In her essay, Briggs urged consideration of residents who may be living in these dangerous buildings. “The new ordinance [would] give the local government the power to help clean up blight, damaged buildings or abandoned properties in a timely manner. However, when human beings are living in such a building, there ought to be a solution and offer of assistance to find the resident new living conditions.”

Briggs is known for giving back, even with her busy schedule as a student. She has volunteered for multiple events in her community, from the Special Olympics, the Lamar Woodley Thanksgiving Food Drive and AIDS walk.

Briggs was grateful to receive the scholarship, telling MTA, “This scholarship means a lot to me because it will continue to help me pursue my education and help me defray my college expenses. I am always very grateful to receive any scholarship because it helps so much. I am very thankful!”

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