

## **Bob Williams Memorial Award: Rusty Volk**

Bob Williams was short—but mighty.

Bob had a laugh you could hear across the fairgrounds, a story for every situation, and a presence that made people stop what they were doing and listen. When Bob talked, you leaned in. When Bob showed up, things got better. Through his work with DATCP, Bob traveled from fair to fair helping them become the very best versions of themselves. When we lost Bob, the void he left behind was enormous—so large that it has taken the entire fair community to begin filling it.



That is why the Bob Williams Memorial Award exists. It is not given lightly. It honors those who are, like Bob, larger than life—and yes, often short in stature but towering in impact.

Which brings us, quite perfectly, to Rusty Volk.

Rusty has spent 18 years serving the fair industry with deep passion, boundless energy, and unwavering commitment—not only to the Northern Wisconsin State Fair, but to the Wisconsin Association of Fairs, IAFE, and fairs everywhere. He has been an advocate, a leader, a teacher, a sounding board, and, most importantly, a friend.

Many people say, “My door is always open.”  
Rusty’s truly is.

Many people say, “Give me a call anytime.”  
People actually do call Rusty—and he always answers.

Many people claim expertise.

Rusty quietly *is* an expert—especially when it comes to legislation—and will be the first to say he’s “just trying to help.”

Rusty honors the history of fairs deeply, while always looking ahead. How can we improve our fairgrounds? How do we increase attendance? How do we support our staff and ensure they’re compensated for their hard work? How do we adapt, evolve, and still protect the heart of what makes fairs special? These are the questions Rusty lives every day.

As Executive Director of the Northern Wisconsin State Fair for more than 13 years, Rusty has been an enthusiastic leader and advocate not just locally, but statewide and internationally. He has served as a District Director with WAF, on the Legislative and Fairest of the Fairs Committees—where he proudly served as the “token man”—and on the IAFE Non-Fair Facilities Usage Committee.

During one of the most challenging periods our industry has ever faced, Rusty was instrumental in helping establish critical funding sources, including the SVOG Grant and Wisconsin Department of Administration Live Events and Tourism Capital Grants. He has pushed through meaningful legislation—from fire suppression regulations to increased state aid funding—always with the bigger picture in mind.

But Rusty’s legacy isn’t just found in policies passed or projects completed.

It’s found in conversations.

In mentorship.

In the phone calls returned.

In the advice freely given.

In the beer shared at the end of a long fair day.

In the way he makes people feel supported, valued, and part of something bigger.

For his exceptional service.

For his tireless dedication.

For his humility, wisdom, and humor.

For his unwavering friendship to the fair industry.

It is with immense pride, gratitude, and affection that we present the Bob Williams Memorial Award to Rusty Volk.

Congratulations, Rusty.