

The Wisconsin Association of Fairs awarded several awards at the 2026 WAF Annual Convention at the Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells, January 11-15.

V. I. P. Award: Awarded to an individual or couple (any two people) non-fair board member/non-committee member, no specific length of service required.

District 1, Sharon Schaefer, Central Wisconsin State Fair

Sharon has been a valued part of the Central Wisconsin State Fair for 40 years. Always full of fresh ideas, she is constantly looking for new ways to engage fairgoers and increase community participation.



Sharon started the Wonders of Wisconsin exhibit, which showcases the unique features that make our state so special. Her passion and creativity brings valuable information to fairgoers about all things Wisconsin. A new theme each year keeps the exhibit fresh and exciting. No matter what the topic, Sharon makes sure there is always something new and meaningful for everyone to learn. Sharon was also instrumental in creating the Snack Shack, where fairgoers could sample delicious, locally made Wisconsin products. This year, she launched the Tallest and Ugliest Weed contests, which drew in over 40 entries.

Sharon is a strong supporter of our Fairest of the Fair Program. In 2024, she helped organize our first Fairest Reunion Day, which brought former Central Wisconsin State Fair Fairests together for a day of fun and reconnection.

Sharon's passion and willingness to take on new challenges, transforming ideas into engaging and memorable experiences, have earned her the VIP Award.

District 2, Mary Cooley, Jackson County Fair

For 36 years, Mary Cooley has, and continues to be, a pillar of dedication, leadership, and service as the Antiques Superintendent at the Jackson County Fair. As superintendent, Mary goes far beyond overseeing exhibits. Her efforts ensure that the antiques are not only appreciated as artifacts but also understood as valuable connections to the stories and traditions that have shaped Jackson County and beyond.



Mary is a quiet yet powerful leader. She has mentored a team of ten volunteers, welcomed exhibitors with warmth, and cultivated a space where history is celebrated and honored. Through her guidance, the Antiques Department has grown into the fair's largest department featuring over 1,000 exhibits by 62 exhibitors.

After each fair, new exhibitors receive a handwritten thank-you note from Mary, expressing her gratitude for their participation and excitement at having them join the antiques department.

Every exhibitor also receives a Christmas card reminding them of the upcoming fair book, with changes, as she invites them to exhibit again. Mary has not only preserved the past but inspired the future by providing a substantial financial gift that allowed the fair to remodel the entire Antique Building.

Mary's tireless commitment has strengthened the Jackson County Fair and enriched the lives of all who exhibit and attend.

District 3, Kellie Zink, Sauk County Fair

For over 40 years, the Sauk County fair has benefited from Kellie Zink's skills, dedication and passion. Our boards, superintendents, parents, exhibitors and each of our fair patrons have grown from her contributions. In the 80's, she volunteered within the fair's horse department, and then, for 20 years, became the Superintendent. She developed a program that led countless youth to become better horsemen.



Kellie retired after dedicating over 15 years of time and service as a secretary and then treasurer to the board. She continued to volunteer at the fair, assisting in the office, ticket booth, grandstand, or anywhere help was needed.

Her passion for coaching youth and sharing her knowledge led her to return as a horse project leader. Kellie's patience and ability to connect has helped many exhibitors grow and improve.

Over the past year, Kellie's volunteerism was called upon to assist the board in the transition of a new treasurer. Her guidance, for the new officer and the board, has resulted in a stronger financial understanding and direction for the fair. She is valued for her knowledge and willingness to give of her time and energy. Always with a smile, she builds confidence with kindness and a steady demeanor and has made the Sauk County Fair a better place for each of us.

District 4, Richard Mace, Green Lake County

Every fair has that person who works tirelessly behind the scenes to make it all happen. Chumly is that person for the Green Lake County Fair. He would never ask for recognition or an award, but no one is more deserving.



Chumly has been with the fair for nearly five decades, becoming a Junior Beef Leader in 4-H in 1978 and continuing to serve as beef superintendent ever since. Under his guidance, the beef barn has outgrown its space - from just 13 steers, and 4 llamas to now over 50 head of cattle.

He was instrumental in forming the Green Lake County Livestock Council, which oversees the fair auction. He has served in leadership roles there and on the Green Lake County Fair Youth Exhibit Committee. He lines up auctioneers, coordinates with bank staff and truckers, sets up the sound system, finds arena help, and ensures the auction runs seamlessly. For years he has served as the auction emcee, bringing humor and energy that keeps buyers engaged. Year-round, he visits businesses encouraging them to support the youth exhibitors.

Chumly leads by example and his dedication is unmatched. Even on the day of his knee replacement surgery, he made it to the fair to help sell steers. He has built lifelong friendships with youth and families across generations.