

MANDI event draws 850 attendees honoring neighborhood development work

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Members of First Stage led the audience in a call and response at the end of the award presentation, joined by all of the finalists. (Photos by Emmy A. Yates)



During the opening reception, MANDI attendees viewed art from different neighborhoods, including artist Reynaldo Hernandez whose studio is in Harambee.



Dawn Sanders Cavilla, daughter of the late Welford Sanders, and Ben Johnson, chairman of the Martin Luther King Economic Development Corp. board, pose with the Vision Award, presented posthumously to Sanders.



Sanders Cavilla shared stories from throughout her father's life and career. (Photo by Adam Carr)



Michael Gosman, executive director of ACTS Housing, speaks after accepting the PNC Bank Trail Blazer Award from Eugene Manzanet, vice president of the bank.



Tom Schneider, executive director of COA Youth & Family Centers (second from right, seated) gathers with colleagues at the MANDI event. Schneider accepted the BMO Harris Bank Cornerstone Award on behalf of his organization.



Rodney Bourrage, founder of Operation Dream, poses with Jamie Reeve III, senior vice president of Northern Trust, who presented the Northern Trust Navigator Award.



Diane Beckley, chief operating officers of St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care Bucyrus Campus, accepts the State Farm Building Blocks Award.



Sister Patricia Rogers, executive director of the Dominican Center, and John Dargle, director of Milwaukee County Parks, accept the Brewers Community Foundation Public Space Award on behalf of Moody Park.



Larry and Sharon Adams, co-founders of Walnut Way Conservation Corp., address the crowd after being awarded a Wells Fargo People's Choice Award.



Mayor Tom Barrett chats with Ana Simpson and Leticia Ramirez after the award ceremony.

1. [1](#)
2. [2](#)
3. [3](#)
4. [4](#)
5. [5](#)
6. [6](#)
7. [7](#)
8. [8](#)
9. [9](#)
10. [10](#)
11. [11](#)

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- [>](#)

More than 850 attendees at the Milwaukee Awards for Neighborhood Development Innovation (MANDIs) dinner Wednesday night were among the first to learn that attorney Donsia Strong Hill will be LISC Milwaukee's new executive director.

LISC CEO Michael Rubinger introduced Strong Hill, an attorney and consultant, who follows Laura Bray in the role. Bray resigned in December after a short tenure. Rubinger also announced a \$25 million investment in Milwaukee over the next five years.

[COA Youth and Family Centers](#) was a big winner at the annual event, held at Potawatomi Hotel & Casino. COA won both the BMO Harris Bank Cornerstone Award for its work in the Amani neighborhood and a Wells Fargo People's Choice Award, chosen by a public vote. [Larry and Sharon Adams](#), co-founders of Walnut Way Conservation Corp., and [Doors Open Milwaukee](#) also won People's Choice awards.

The People's Choice Award voting, housed on the Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service website, drew 2,524 voters.

All winners received a trophy and a \$1,000 contribution. The 15 finalists were selected by a volunteer selection committee comprising 40 private, public and government volunteers.

In addition, the Vision Award was presented posthumously by the LISC Local Advisory Board to Welford Sanders, executive director of the Martin Luther King Economic Development Corp. Sanders' daughter, Dawn Sanders Cavilla, accepted the award, recalling one of her father's favorite quotations from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land."

Sanders Cavilla set the tone for the awards presentation by stating that her father never gave up on his community.

"The MANDIs are a celebration of Milwaukee's neighborhoods, and the passionate, committed people who work tirelessly to improve their communities," said Dawn Hutchison-Weiss, communications director of [LISC Milwaukee](#).

Winners and finalists are listed below:

[ACTS Housing](#) won the PNC Bank Trailblazer Award, which recognizes an innovative approach to a community problem. First Stage's historical play series, [The Wisconsin Cycle](#), and [Rebuilding Together Greater Milwaukee](#) were also finalists.

[St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care – Bucyrus Campus](#) won the State Farm Building Blocks Award for a real estate project that improves the community. [Maskani Place](#) and [Paper Box Lofts](#) were also finalists.

COA Youth & Family Centers was awarded the , for the organization's work in the Amani neighborhood. The award recognizes an organization for commitment and effectiveness over time. The [Northside Housing Initiative](#) and [Safe & Sound](#) were also finalists.

[Rodney Bourrage Sr.](#), founder and executive director of Operation Dream, won the Northern Trust Navigator Award, given to an individual or individuals for leadership. Larry and Sharon Adams and [Dick Larsen](#) were also finalists.

Milwaukee County and community partners received the Brewers Community Foundation Public Space Award for the revitalization of [Moody Park](#). Finalists included Doors Open Milwaukee and [Turtle Park](#).