

Mike Matejka and Kari Sandhaas of Normal - Bloomington-Normal award

Mike Matejka and Kari Sandhaas of Normal exemplify the spirit of philanthropy through understanding of the importance of community, philanthropy and service focusing on education in the community. They received the 2024 IPCF Philanthropists of the Year – Bloomington-Normal award.

“This husband and wife team have used their ‘super powers’ to benefit and uplift others,” said the person who nominated them. “They deliver a ‘one-two punch’ to make an impact not only in our community, but throughout our world!”

Matejka is a community activist, retired union representative, author and historian.



He served as the Governmental Affairs Director for the Great Plains Laborers District Council, edited the Grand Prairie Union News for 40 years and was also elected for 18 years to the Bloomington City Council representing the Second Ward. As an Illinois Labor History Society Vice-President, Matejka is knowledgeable on Illinois’ nationally significant labor history.

He is a past-president and current board member of the McLean County Museum of History in Bloomington, where he was guest curator for seven different exhibits, including the just opened exhibit “Deadly Deception: Asbestos in McLean County.” Matejka has also written for multiple publications and is currently completing an overview book on Illinois labor history.

Matejka has worked tirelessly to fulfill the mission of Bloomington-Normal’s Not In Our Town by hosting forums, organizing panel discussions, marches, rallies and trainings. He worked and collaborated with legislators at all levels – local, state and national – and was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 2008.

Other organizations that Matejka has been involved with include the Historic Pullman Foundation in Chicago, United Way of McLean County Board, Autism McLean, Multicultural Leadership Institute and Operation Recycle/Ecology Action Center.

Among the awards and recognition he has received are Town of Normal’s Citizen of the Year, McLean County League of Women Voters’ Citizen of the Year, Multicultural Leadership Program’s Community Service Award, Illinois Humanities Council’s Studs Terkel Award and the Illinois AFL-CIO Robert Gibson Community Service Award.

Both Matejka and Sandhaas have received the Illinois State University Burton Mercier Alumni Community Service Award and the Homan-Grabill Community Peace Award.

With a lifelong career in the fields of training and education, and as a Certified Diversity Professional, Sandhaas strongly values cultivating multicultural understanding and the inclusion of diverse perspectives, integrating that belief into both her community volunteer roles and her work at COUNTRY Financial. As a training designer and educator, Sandhaas' work has focused on leadership development and multicultural education. At COUNTRY, she also co-leads programming for the Multicultural Employee Resource Group. Prior to COUNTRY Financial she was Creative Director for Teleologic Learning Company and The Laurasian Institution, an Asia-focused international education non-profit.

Sandhaas demonstrates the value of civic engagement both locally and globally, serving on local nonprofit boards, in various citizen committee roles, and through her work in international education and peace delegations. She has a reputation for leading organizational change and helping people to gain clarity, confidence and courage in taking action to advance the mission of the organization and for the good of the community at large.

She has served on the boards of the Ecology Action Center (EAC) since 2006 and Autism McLean (AM) since 2007, and is also on the Carle-BroMenn Ethics Committee.

She founded AM's Autism Friendly Community outreach partnership, organizing public awareness events, speaking engagements, trainings, and the development of an autism friendly community whitepaper. She previously founded and chaired Diversity's Missing Piece, an initiative promoting autism awareness among employers.

She was instrumental in leading the Multicultural Leadership Program (MCLP) through strategic planning and organizational changes in her previous role on the MCLP executive board.

Other organizations Sandhaas has been involved in supporting include the Town of Normal Public Arts Committee, Not in Our Town, YWCA, Parrett Endowment for Arts and Culture, Habitat for Humanity of McLean County, United Farmworkers Service Center, Women for Guatemala and Witness for Peace.

Among the awards and recognition she has received are Heroes Embracing Autistic Lives' Making a Difference Award, Autism McLean's Gold Star Member Award, COUNTRY Financial service awards, YWCA Women of Distinction Nominee and McLean County Chamber of Commerce's Athena Award finalist.

Matejka and Sandhaas are parents of a daughter on the autism spectrum.