

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Winners Announced for inaugural *Minnesota Job Honor Awards***

**Initiative aims to employ disadvantaged jobseekers by celebrating “A New Kind of Hero”**

ST PAUL — The Minnesota Job Honor Awards, a new initiative aimed at recognizing Minnesotans who overcome barriers to employment, has announced its top honorees for 2017.

The awards were presented in partnership with the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce at their “Hidden Talent Pools” conference on May 10 in St. Paul. Business leaders from across the state assembled to witness the ceremony, in which biographical videos described honoree efforts to win life-changing jobs.

“Minnesota employers continue to seek new solutions to our state’s workforce shortage,” said Doug Loon, Minnesota Chamber president. “Finding qualified workers is a persistent challenge among companies of all types and sizes. The Minnesota Job Honor Awards is one way to engage our state’s untapped workforce by shining a spotlight on success stories.”

One of this year’s honorees is Aaron Corcoran of St. Anthony. Corcoran is widely recognized as the state’s super-user of *Real Time Talent* — a computer program connecting Minnesota jobseekers with career opportunities. Born with cerebral palsy and using a wheelchair, Corcoran overcame physical challenges to earn a master’s degree from the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs. His professor there, Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman, noted Corcoran’s potential and introduced him to colleagues who would help launch his career as a workforce innovation specialist. Corcoran has helped more than 2000 Minnesotans discover career pathways through his work at Minneapolis-based Youthlink and the recently-opened Cedar Riverside Opportunity Center. His clients range from homeless youth to Somali immigrants. “Aaron’s a great asset not only to this neighborhood, but to the entire state of Minnesota” says Mohamed Ali of the Cedar Riverside center.

Sharing individual honors is Nancy Lynn Martinez of Roseville. Martinez fled an abusive home at age 11 and became homeless, at one point sleeping in a baseball dugout across the street from a school she longed to attend. “I always felt cheated,” she says, “I loved school, but I didn’t go past fifth grade.” Martinez eventually discovered a place to belong, but it was with “the criminal element of society.” At age 12 she sold cocaine and heroin on the streets of Minneapolis. Martinez finally landed in prison on felony burglary charges at age 21. At the Shakopee Correctional Facility she discovered machining, taking classes that would lay the foundation for a career after her release three years later. “Education was the turning point in my life,” said Martinez, “it gave me an opportunity to experience real change and finally have a life that was worth living.” She’s now an adjunct instructor of machining at St. Paul College, and speaks publicly as an advocate for prison education initiatives.

Corcoran and Martinez each received a \$500 cash award and engraved crystal trophy.

In the employer category, CentraCare Health of St. Cloud was honored for their commitment to recruit disadvantaged jobseekers. Known for their progressive approach to hiring immigrants, CentraCare also partners with the Stearns-Benton Employment & Training Council (SBETC) to host a summer youth employment camp in St. Cloud. Tammy Biery, Executive Director of SBETC, lauded CentraCare for their

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community leadership. “I see the passion that starts at the leadership level for hiring the immigrant population, working with youth, and developing that next generation of the workforce.”

Sharing employer honors is Care & Rehab-Caledonia, a long-term care facility based in southeast Minnesota. Like most small-town employers, they struggle to recruit from a declining workforce. Citing a recent labor market study, Wanda Jensen, Operations Director for Workforce Development, Inc. said “We can count on about 12 new entrants into the workforce per county, per year in this area over the next ten years. Every available person needs an opportunity.” Care & Rehab-Caledonia’s recruitment strategy includes a willingness to consider candidates who have overcome life challenges: Challenges that sometimes result in an imperfect work history. “They have high expectations of job applicants,” said Pam Erickson of Workforce Development, Inc., “but as long as I’ve known them, they’ve been open to hiring people with challenges. They’ll give you a chance.”

Kyle Horn, founder and director of America’s Job Honor Awards, congratulated this year’s honorees. “Minnesota is celebrating a new kind of hero,” says Horn. “These amazing honorees demonstrate that Minnesotans who overcome patterns of failure or challenges such as disability are not only highly qualified employees, but frequently they demonstrate remarkable work ethic and loyalty.”

Honoree videos can be viewed at the organization’s website, [www.JobHonor.org](http://www.JobHonor.org).

#### **About the Minnesota Job Honor Awards:**

The Minnesota Job Honor Awards celebrates Minnesotans who overcome barriers to employment, and the employers who hire them. MN-JHA’s mission is to rekindle hope and energize the work ethic across Minnesota, through the celebration of a new kind of hero. [www.JobHonor.org](http://www.JobHonor.org). Lead sponsor of the Awards is **ManpowerGroup**, world leader in innovative workforce solutions.

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