



Regional Rock Stars feel Compelled to Inspire Hope for All

How do we make sure good things happen? Look around, see the people making change and tell their stories. These people and organizations are Regional Rock Stars, and their acts of kindness and gratitude are inspiring hope throughout our communities—and helping to strengthen communities even in the most difficult of times. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these stories have emerged almost daily. So, each week, a group of west suburban organization dedicated to business, health, government and community will share these stories online and with the public.

Karen Ayala, DuPage County Health Department. From the earliest days of the COVID-19 crisis, Karen Ayala led her agency and community through uncharted waters with competence, calm and an unwavering commitment to the health and safety of all; she does so with a collaborative approach. During a time of fear and anxiety, Karen’s leadership is enlightening and pragmatic, meeting the needs of each constituency – business, municipal government, health care and human services. Karen says, “To be nominated as a Regional Rock Star is an incredible and humbling benchmark in my career. In my mind, the messages of the COVID 19 response, or dealing with racism and inequality, will be lost unless they are provided with respect, kindness and helping turn people from hopelessness into action. It is easy to find many examples of pain, anguish and misery in the world around us—I strongly support the need to address those needs, but to do it with a lens and a platform of hopefulness, optimism and partnership as we look to move our communities further.” She explains, too, how important it is to reflect and model the qualities of calm, hope, and kindness and says she learned early on that a key life lesson is “it’s always easy to be kind and inspire hope in people when everything is going well and they are being nice to you—much more challenging, but necessary, to bring those qualities during tough times when you, yourself are stressed. This is an indicator of true character.”

Molly Miklosz. Molly creates drawings of people’s homes to raise money for BEDS Plus. What started out as a quarantine project blossomed quickly, and the Western Springs resident found her schedule quickly booked with requests for her artwork. "The responses were overwhelming," said Molly, who personally delivers her drawings. “It began on a sunny afternoon on my driveway. I challenged myself this quarantine to draw something new each day, and I had decided to sketch our house while the weather was so nice back in March,” Molly explains. “A neighbor saw me and asked for a similar drawing of her home. From there I had the idea that I could utilize my passion for art to help others. I posted on Facebook that I would draw a 5”x7” ink house portrait for anyone who would donate to BEDS. The requests were overwhelming! So successful was this project, that instead of drawing just 10 homes (my original cap), I’ve drawn close to 25! There’s something about drawing someone’s home, or place of safety, that resonates with me. At a time that we are advised to stay home, I have noticed many people that aren’t as fortunate to have a safe haven in the middle of this crisis. If we don’t care for our neighbors’ wellbeing, what are we even doing?” Follow Molly on Instagram @mcmiklosz_art

Keeley Mahoney, Student volunteer at the LeaderShop. Keeley is a high school student who is heavily involved with programs at The LeaderShop and serves on the Board of Directors. Oftentimes, she is willing to take on leadership roles and lead activities with her peers. During the first week of shut down, she volunteered to help deliver grocery to folks in need. Keeley's commitment to The LeaderShop and to serving her community during this challenging time has been extraordinary. She sets a great example of what a great youth leader is. "When the pandemic reached our community, and we had to go into self-quarantine, I was searching for ways to not only occupy my time but actively help those in need," Keeley says. "I think it's so important for people to find ways to stay connected to one another, for me that has been through volunteering. I've been able to share this experience with my siblings, and each week it's something we all look forward to. It's so easy to just stay inside and block out the rest of the world during this time, but safely and actively talking to a friend, reconnecting with a program or donating your time allows you to feel meaningful during this stressful time. I'm so thankful to have the LeaderShop. It's a special community, and I think everyone can find their own special community that makes you feel meaningful and actively engage in it."

The Regional Rock Stars is a collaborative effort by AMITA Health, Community Memorial Foundation, the Hinsdale Chamber of Commerce, West Central Municipal Conference and the West Suburban Chamber of Commerce & Industry. **We invite you to share more stories of the individuals who are making a difference in our community so that we can recognize them and be inspired by the ways they are bringing the entire region together. [Use this simple form to let us know who you know and who deserves to be recognized.](#)**

Individuals will be recognized at a community celebration at the end of the year.



AMITA Health (www.AMITAhealth.org) is a joint operating company formed by AdventHealth in Altamonte Springs, Fla., and St. Louis-based Ascension. AMITA Health is the largest health system in Illinois, comprising 19 hospitals and more than 230 sites of care. The health system has 900 providers in its medical groups, more than 26,000 associates and 7,000 physician partners and serves over 6.6 million residents in the greater Chicagoland area.

Community Memorial Foundation (CMF) is a private health conversion foundation established in 1995. The Foundation's grantmaking and community work are guided by its mission - to measurably improve the health of those who live and work in the western suburbs of Chicago. Throughout 25 years of regional investment, CMF has awarded more than \$77 million dollars to nonprofit organizations in the western suburbs of Cook County and southeastern portion of DuPage County. cmfdn.org

Hinsdale Chamber of Commerce has been in operation for more than 90 years by representing the voice of businesses in Hinsdale and beyond and has created a legacy in serving the entire community by Connecting Business through Community-Leadership-Opportunity-Involvement.

The West Central Municipal Conference serves as the Council of Government representing 52 local governments in west suburban Cook and eastern DuPage Counties. Within our mission statement, we seek to serve our members by fostering municipal cooperation and communication; developing solutions on matters of mutual concern; advocating common interests at the county, state, and federal levels of government; and offering training, technical assistance and resource information that contribute to the efficient management of local government. westcook.org

The West Suburban Chamber of Commerce & Industry is the collective voice of the region's business community, advocating pro-business initiatives and public policy on a state and local level. Economic prosperity is driven by promoting the thriving business climate, geographical preference and demographic diversity of the region. We leverage the strength of our membership by encouraging innovation and the exchange of ideas, information and opportunity for the benefit of the entire community. Wscci.org