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Appreciation Gala

Northern Community Mediation (NCM) celebrated its annual, Appreciation Gala on Thursday, May 28. Rather than its traditional, adult social gathering, however, this year's event was held online via Zoom with over 30 people in attendance. Doug Van Epps, Director of the Office of Dispute Resolution, Michigan Supreme Court in Lansing shared the various ways in which the courts and the legal community in general are continuing to offer services in light of COVID-19. He stressed the important role mediation has played in that process. Van Epps lauded the contribution of NCM's volunteer mediators and emphasized the fact that NCM is exemplary throughout the state of Michigan.

The annual awards were then presented by Executive Director Dr. Jane Millar. The Rookie Mediator of the Year Award goes to a mediator who has been a mediator for NCM for less than two years and according to Millar "who goes above and beyond the call of duty, who often inconveniences himself or herself to help out the Case Managers in a pinch, and who demonstrates professional mediation skills." The 2019 recipient of this award went to Steve Hall, "who has a wonderful sense of humor, is fun to be around, and shows fairness coupled with compassion"

The Veteran Mediator of the Year Award recognizes an individual who has been mediating for NCM for more than two years but has the same qualities as the Rookie Mediator of the Year. "Friendly is the first word that comes to mind when thinking about this year's recipient. She has a knack for putting clients at ease even under some of the most stressful situations. Her skills as a mediator are second to none." According to Millar, these words describe Denise Drake.

The Advocate of the Year Award "pays homage to an individual who supports mediation in general—a person who suggests that people try mediation and who is a walking billboard on behalf of NCM. Although the 2019 recipient of this award is a mediator, "What made her stand out...is that she went so far as to bring eight of her friends, at her own expense, to the Charlevoix Theatre Party" so that she could create awareness and help spread the word about mediation and NCM. Cyndy Tonkavich was recognized for her devotion.

The final Award presented was The Leah Award, which is not necessarily bestowed every year. Named for the late Leah Green, who was a dedicated mediator, trainer and

advocate for NCM for many years, this award pays tribute to an individual who has been making a difference in the world of mediation over time. Millar's words, "This special award is going to an individual who has been at NCM's mediation table over 30 times. She truly seeks justice and fairness for all. She understands the value of long term impact of win/win over win/lose....I am referring to a dynamic attorney....Always, she represents the best interests of her clients without having to go for the throat of her client's opposition. She has been a driving force behind innovative initiatives for handling divorce cases," and "she possesses an intuitive understanding of mediation." This award went to Jenny Deegan, "a practitioner of the mediation process, a highly ethical attorney and an advocate for NCM and the process of alternative dispute resolution."

The evening ended with those present raising their glasses for a virtual toast to the four award recipients, as well as the mediators, board members and staff who make Northern Community Mediation an exemplary organization throughout the state of Michigan.

Northern Community Mediation is a non-profit organization that provides an alternative means of resolving conflict. Trained mediators, who meet with the parties involved in a dispute, facilitate so that the individuals themselves can resolve the conflict

Anyone interested in learning more about Northern Community Mediation should contact Dr. Jane Millar at 231.487.1771.

Pictured from left to right: Steve Hall, Denise Drake, Cyndy Tonkavich, Jenny Deegan

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