



2024
Bloomington
Diamond Service Awards

DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel
Bloomington - Minneapolis South
Grand Ballroom

April 25, 2024



Bloomington *Minnesota Travel & Tourism*

PROGRAM

4:30 p.m.

RECEPTION

5:30 p.m.

PRESENTATION OF FINALISTS
Bloomington Food Safety Awards
Hospitality Hall of Fame Awards
Spirit of Hospitality Award
Dinner
Diamond Service Awards
“Be Our Guest” Tribute to
Nominees

EMCEES

Bonnie L. Carlson,
*President & CEO, Bloomington Minnesota
Travel & Tourism*

Jim Cunningham,
Actor, Playwright, and Producer



THE PROCESS

Diamond Service Award nominations are submitted by management personnel from the hospitality and retail businesses in Bloomington in 14 categories. All nominees are personally interviewed by a panel of independent judges and rated on a point system to determine final scores. The accounting firm Abdo verifies all tabulations and results.

Welcome

Tonight we come together to honor and celebrate the remarkable individuals who embody the spirit of hospitality in Bloomington. From the dedicated front-line staff to the visionary leaders, each one of you plays a vital role in shaping the experiences of our visitors and guests.

I am thrilled to share with you an exciting development within our organization—the launch of our new brand identity, Bloomington Minnesota Travel & Tourism. This milestone reflects our unwavering commitment to embracing our region’s energy while staying true to our tradition of hospitality. Designed in collaboration with branding agency Duffy, our new visual identity captures the essence of Bloomington as a dynamic destination bursting with opportunities for exploration and adventure.

At the heart of our new brand is a star, symbolizing the iconic Mall of America and its magnetic allure. Surrounding this star is a jewel, representing the rich diversity of experiences our region has to offer. And finally, the outer diamond shape pays tribute to our beloved Bloomington Diamond Service Awards, honoring 26 years of excellence in hospitality.

Your commitment to excellence doesn’t go unnoticed. These qualities are intrinsic to who you are, and they’ve played a significant role in shaping Bloomington into the vibrant and thriving city it is today. Together, we’ve welcomed more than 40 million visitors to our city each year, creating experiences that resonate and draw people back time and again. Through your dedication and stewardship, you’ve crafted experiences that define our city as a welcoming and inviting destination. Whether it’s providing attentive service, maintaining immaculate facilities, serving delicious meals, or engaging in friendly conversations, you’ve made our visitors feel truly at home, regardless of how far they’ve traveled.

Congratulations to all the nominees and winners tonight. Your unwavering dedication, exceptional service, and commitment to excellence are not only appreciated but also deserving of the highest accolades. Here’s to a memorable evening of celebration and recognition of your outstanding contributions to our thriving hospitality industry.



Bonnie L. Carlson

*President & CEO
Bloomington Minnesota Travel
& Tourism*

History of the *Diamond Service Awards*

The Bloomington Diamond Service Awards was first held in 1996 to honor the powerhouse that is Bloomington's hospitality industry. From Mall of America retail stores to over 45 hotels, there are thousands of opportunities to work in hospitality in Bloomington, and the Diamond Service Awards aim to recognize those who make the greatest positive impact on the destination's visitors.

The Bloomington Minnesota Travel & Tourism team was initially inspired by a similar event held in Calgary, Alberta, Canada that honored that destination's hospitality employees. After attending Calgary's awards ceremony and speaking with Visit Calgary staff to better understand how they produced their program, BMTT President and CEO Bonnie Carlson and Vice President of Marketing Jan Kroells put their own spin on the idea of recognizing frontline employees and launched the Diamond Service Awards.

Now in its 26th year, the Diamond Service Awards annually honors hospitality staff who work tirelessly to deliver excellent customer service to their guests to ensure repeat business. Nominees are interviewed by members of the hospitality community, who listen to stories of extraordinary efforts and the great lengths these employees go to for guests. The awards' 14 categories include Best Bartender, Best Retail Personnel, Best Transportation Personnel, and more. Recipients of the Spirit of Hospitality Award, which recognizes an individual or a company who has made a significant contribution to the travel and tourism industry, and inductees into the Hospitality Hall of Fame are also celebrated at the gala.

The Diamond Service Awards has become a significant industry event, with nearly 900 guests attending each year from Bloomington hotels, restaurants, attractions, and retail stores, plus guests from the Minneapolis-Saint Paul business community. The event is the only one of its kind in the country and is a yearly highlight for the often unsung heroes of the Bloomington hospitality industry.

As we embark on this exhilarating journey, our mission remains resolute: to inspire travelers to uncover the treasures of Bloomington and to partake in the unparalleled experiences and renowned Minnesota hospitality that define our city. I extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated hospitality workforce and the entire Bloomington community for their unwavering support as we step into this exciting new chapter together.

—BONNIE L. CARLSON

Bloomington Food Safety Awards Finalists

Food isn't just sustenance; it's ingrained in our culture, offering solace and connection. From a comforting home-cooked meal to expertly crafted dishes, it evokes memories and bridges gaps. Recognizing the unseen efforts in food production, we honor those in the food service industry who exceed expectations. Each year, Bloomington health inspectors nominate establishments based on inspections, with volunteers from the Bloomington Food Collaborative interviewing and scoring nominees. The city's Advisory Board of Health then approves award recipients. Let's extend our gratitude to these businesses and their employees for ensuring the quality of our food, allowing us to savor it without worry.

Congratulations to the following businesses!

Full Service Hotel

Renaissance Minneapolis
Bloomington Hotel
Sheraton Bloomington Hotel

Full Service Restaurant

Applebee's Grill + Bar Lyndale
Chevy's Fresh Mex
Hooters
Olive Garden Italian Kitchen

Quick Service & Cafeteria

Bruegger's Bagels
Café Fusion
Culvers
Noodles & Co.
Panda Express - North

Retail Grocery

Cub Foods - France
Cub Foods - Lyndale

Limited Service

Country Inn & Suites by Radisson,
Bloomington at Mall of America/
Park Plaza Minneapolis Mall of
America
Home2 Suites by Hilton Mall of
America
Home2 Suites by Hilton Minneapolis
Bloomington

Previous Recipients

U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar
U.S. Senate, 2023

US Foods
2020

**Minnesota Super Bowl LII
Host Committee**
2019

Larry Lee
City of Bloomington, 2018

Bloomington Police Department
2017

Jim Saccoman
Embassy Suites Bloomington, 2016

Gene Winstead
Mayor of Bloomington, 2015

David Fong Family
David Fong's, 2014

Bruce Karstadt
American Swedish Institute, 2013

Steve Fox
Greenspring Media, 2012

Mall of America®
2011

Minnesota Zoo
2010

Rep. Jim M. Ramstad
U.S. House of Representatives, 2009

Jeffrey Hamiel
Metropolitan Airports Commission, 2008

Sen. William H. Belanger
Minnesota Legislature, 2007

Bonnie L. Carlson
Bloomington Convention & Visitors
Bureau, 2006

Sam Thompson
metroConnections, 2005

John Edman
MN Office of Tourism, 2004

Richard Anderson
Northwest Airlines, 2003

Governor Jesse Ventura
State of Minnesota, 2002

Marilyn Carlson Nelson
Carlson Cos., 2001

Gary L. Gandrud
Faegre & Benson, 2000

2024 Spirit of Hospitality



Minnesota Sports and Events

Minnesota Sports and Events (MNSE), honored with the 2023 Spirit of Hospitality Award, epitomizes dedication to Minnesota and Bloomington's future as a premier visitor destination. Under the visionary leadership of President and CEO Wendy Blackshaw, MNSE has crafted a strategic roadmap for success in hosting mega events like the NCAA Big Ten Men's and Women's Basketball tournaments, the 2024 U.S. Olympic Team Trials – Gymnastics, and the upcoming IIHF World Junior Ice Hockey Championships, fostering economic growth and community engagement. Most events also usually have enhanced activations at Mall of America—such as the week-long Title IX Celebration during NCAA Women's Final Four—to further promote and generate excitement. Bloomington Minnesota Travel & Tourism helped to found MNSE in 2020 and remains highly involved in assisting with bids and welcoming sports fans to the metro area. "This partnership is such an integral part of what we do," says Blackshaw. "We couldn't do this without them."

The team's commitment to excellence and collaboration shines through MNSE's initiatives, which go beyond event hosting to include community-driven projects like donating scoreboards and basketball courts, hosting free youth clinics, and fostering statewide volunteerism. A combined passion for sports and love for Minnesota are evident in MNSE's efforts to create outstanding guest experiences. By fostering a culture of hospitality and teamwork among team members, MNSE ensures that every aspect of a visitor's journey, from dining in local restaurants to staying in hotels, reflects the warmth and friendliness for which Minnesota is renowned.

MNSE's dedication to enhancing the visitor experience and promoting Minnesota as a top-notch destination is commendable. The team sets the bar high for a standard of excellence, and Blackshaw notes MNSE started during the pandemic in 2020. "We've gotten through hardships, we're winning more bids, and we have more and more events coming here," she says. "The Spirit of Hospitality is an honor that goes to the entire team and the work we've done together to make these events spectacular and really make a difference in Minnesota."

Through collaborative efforts with local businesses and the community, MNSE continues to elevate Bloomington's hospitality industry and solidify its position as a leading advocate for the city's tourism sector. The Spirit of Hospitality Award is a testament to MNSE's unwavering commitment to excellence and its pivotal role in shaping the future of Minnesota's hospitality landscape. Congratulations, MNSE!

FRONT ROW (L-R): JW Person, Sandy Sweetser, April Houston, Andrea Graham, Tyler Boike, Taylor Friedlander, Steve Madson, and Sy'Rai Trice.

BACK ROW (L-R): Anna DuSaire, John Klinkenberg, Stephanie Hall, Matt Meunier, Gabrielle Grier, Michelle Benson, Ana Hughes, Wendy Blackshaw, Clara Hance, Brendan Bujold, Ashley Williams, Bodil Forsling, and Debbie Estes.

NOT PICTURED: Gino Giovannelli, Ariel Toback, Maria Bloemendal, Coretta Kendricks, and Minori Nakamoto.

2024 Hospitality Hall of Fame

The Diamond Service Awards Committee is pleased to announce the 2024 inductions to the Hospitality Hall of Fame, which honors commitment and longevity in Bloomington's tourism and hospitality industry.



32 YEARS OF SERVICE

Eric Baker

Executive Chef • Hilton Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport

Eric Baker, an esteemed culinary professional, led as Executive Chef at Hilton Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport for 32 years. Recognized by the American Culinary Federation, he earned prestigious awards like Chef of the Year and the Central Education Award. Eric's culinary excellence and mentorship left an enduring impact, fostering a vibrant kitchen culture. Beyond the stove, he excelled as a competitive ice carver and dedicated mentor. Though he retired in 2020, his legacy thrives through his passion for photography and continued involvement in fundraising events. Eric's commitment to culinary artistry and mentorship has left an indelible mark on the hospitality industry.



42 YEARS OF SERVICE

Rodney Fors

General Manager • Crowne Plaza Bloomington

Rodney Fors epitomizes dedication and longevity in the hospitality industry. With over 55 illustrious years in the industry as a whole, Rodney ascended the ranks to retire as General Manager of Crowne Plaza Bloomington. Not content with retirement, he resumed a part-time accounting position at Courtyard Edina Bloomington in April 2023. Rodney's impact extends beyond managerial roles; he fosters relationships and mentors aspiring professionals, shaping the careers of many in Bloomington's burgeoning hotel market. A fixture in the community for over 40 years, Rodney's insights and dedication to guest experience remain invaluable.



50 YEARS OF SERVICE

Luis Blanco

Head of Housekeeping • Hyatt Place Minneapolis Airport-South

With 50 years of combined service at Hyatt Place Minneapolis Airport-South and Embassy Suites by Hilton Minneapolis Airport, Luis Blanco embodies excellence and dedication. Luis's leadership as Head of Housekeeping has set a standard of excellence, exceeding guest expectations and inspiring his team. Beyond his technical proficiency, Luis's genuine kindness and unwavering support create a warm and welcoming atmosphere. His impact extends beyond the hotel, with active community involvement reflecting his generosity and compassion. A true leader and inspiration, Luis's legacy is a testament to his exceptional leadership, unwavering dedication, and profound impact on both the hotel and community.



42 YEARS OF SERVICE

Kevin Westlund

Cook • Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington - Minneapolis South

Kevin Westlund is an icon of the culinary world, dedicating 42 years to crafting exceptional banquet experiences. As the cold prep and morning breakfast cook, Kevin's commitment shines through in every dish he prepares. With meticulous attention to special dietary needs, Kevin ensures every guest receives not only delicious but also safe meals. His unwavering loyalty and leadership during transitions set him apart, making Kevin a cornerstone of culinary excellence and guest satisfaction.

Previous Inductees

BLUE NUMBERS: Indicate years of service

2023

Carol Chapman (50)

Hilton Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport Mall of America

Maria Peña (28)

Sheraton Bloomington Hotel

James Rasmussen (49)

Bloomington Event Center (Knights of Columbus)

Neil Rivard (33)

Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington - Minneapolis South

2020

Michael "Mick" Elder (32)

Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington - Minneapolis South

Dawn Freid (42)

Sheraton Bloomington Hotel

Barbara Phillips (37)

Sheraton Bloomington Hotel

Kathy Sarff (40)

Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington - Minneapolis South

Tairie Starr (26)

Chapel of Love

2019

Sally Hanson, Sandy Moe, Susie Rudenick (116 combined)

Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington - Minneapolis South

Judy Nieto (31)

Hilton Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport Mall of America

Ismael Zavala (24)

Holiday Inn Express & Suites Bloomington Minneapolis Airport Area West

2018

Champawatee "Bobzin" Beni (26)

Courtyard Bloomington by Mall of America

Patricia Bymark (40)

Minneapolis Airport Marriott

Tim Krenik (35)

Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington - Minneapolis South

Isabel Rodriguez (24)

Holiday Inn Express & Suites Bloomington Minneapolis Airport Area West

2015

Dwight Stewart (27)
Crowne Plaza Bloomington MSP Airport/Mall of America

2017

Jackie Ploen (37)
Embassy Suites by Hilton Bloomington

Carrie Poepping (22)

Country Inn & Suites by Carlson Bloomington at Mall of America

Michele Robidoux (30)

Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington - Minneapolis South

Sai Rosser-Ichisumi (30)

Crowne Plaza Bloomington MSP Airport/Mall of America

2016

John Dainty (32)
Thunderbird/Ramada Hotel

Marlene Kurtz (30)

Crowne Plaza Bloomington

Mary Jo Peterson (40)

Sheraton Bloomington Hotel

Mildret "Millie" Phillipp (24)

Mall of America

Sohrab "Sammy" Sadeh (40)

Sheraton Bloomington Hotel

2015

Ursula Chan (40)
Colette Bar and Bistro

Mike Gruebele (34)

Embassy Suites by Hilton Bloomington

Sue Miller (44)

Woolley's Restaurant

2014

Linda Fleming (24)
Quality Inn & Suites Airport

Terry Jagow (29)

Doubletrees by Hilton Hotel Bloomington - Minneapolis South

2013

Mohammed Raki (38)
Sofitel Minneapolis Bloomington

2012

Joseph Skluzacek (20)
Thunderbird/Ramada Hotel

2011

Peggy Gaughran Werdan (47)
Thunderbird/Ramada Hotel

2024 *Diamond Service Awards*

BEST HOSPITALITY ADMINISTRATION

- Cheryl Benson**
Radisson Blu Mall of America
- Amber Dowdell**
Embassy Suites by Hilton Minneapolis Airport
- Jessica Kaiser**
Radisson Blu Mall of America
- Katie MacEachern**
JW Marriott Minneapolis Mall of America
- Breanna Wood**
Courtyard by Marriott Edina Bloomington

BEST GUEST RELATIONS PERSONNEL (HOTEL)

- Todd Hanson**
Hyatt Regency Bloomington - Minneapolis
- Samuel Horton**
Hyatt Regency Bloomington - Minneapolis
- Vanessa Hutchinson**
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-
Minneapolis South
- Marjon Khan**
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-
Minneapolis South
- Azariah Raspberry**
Radisson Blu Mall of America

BEST GUEST RELATIONS PERSONNEL (RETAIL/ATTRACTION)

- Jonathon Freeman**
Great Wolf Lodge
- Nicholas In**
Mall of America
- Kamil Kasin**
Nickelodeon Universe
- Eli Robinson**
SEA LIFE at Mall of America
- Jay Silvernail**
Nickelodeon Universe
- Natalie Wass**
Nickelodeon Universe

BEST RESTAURANT PERSONNEL

- Christopher Lind**
Pizza Novara
- Mario Martinez**
Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville
- Megan Muff**
West Side Perk
- Christopher Summers**
Hazelwood Food + Drink
- Jessica York**
Smack Shack

BEST BANQUET/CATERING PERSONNEL

- Natalie Deiley**
Radisson Blu Mall of America
- Kelly Ekerholm**
Hilton Minneapolis/Bloomington
- Adrian Guallpa Lema**
Hyatt Regency Bloomington - Minneapolis
- Manuel Robles**
JW Marriott Minneapolis Mall of America
- Jeff Strack**
Courtyard by Marriott Bloomington by
Mall of America

BEST HOTEL GUEST SERVICES (LIMITED SERVICE)

- Oscar Ayala**
Residence Inn by Marriott Bloomington by
Mall of America
- Tristan Burrow**
Country Inn & Suites by Radisson, Bloomington
at Mall of America/Park Plaza Minneapolis
Mall of America
- Kateryn I. Lopez-Mendoza**
Residence Inn by Marriott Bloomington by
Mall of America
- Angelo Rosales**
TownePlace Suites Minneapolis Mall
of America
- Jessica Sanchez**
Courtyard by Marriott Bloomington by
Mall of America

BEST HOTEL GUEST SERVICES (FULL SERVICE)

- Dennis Damjanovich**
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-
Minneapolis South
- Ellie Johnson**
Hilton Minneapolis/Bloomington
- Alaetra Long**
Embassy Suites by Hilton Minneapolis Airport
- Melissa Pumper**
Radisson Blu Mall of America
- Margret Tavai Tuisalo'o**
Radisson Blu Mall of America



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**BEST HOUSEKEEPING PERSONNEL
(LIMITED SERVICE)**

- Nairoby Abarca Eligio**
Courtyard by Marriott Edina Bloomington
- Lourdes Alvarez**
Tru by Hilton/Home2 Suites
- Maria Artola**
Courtyard by Marriott Bloomington by
Mall of America
- Rosario Chavez**
Tru by Hilton/Home2 Suites
- Aracely Prudencio de Sibrían**
Country Inn & Suites by Radisson, Bloomington
at Mall of America/Park Plaza Minneapolis
Mall of America

**BEST HOUSEKEEPING PERSONNEL
(FULL SERVICE)**

- Ronald Battles**
Great Wolf Lodge
- Sayuri Francisco**
JW Marriott Minneapolis Mall of America
- Indranie Jaddunath**
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-
Minneapolis South
- Oscar Riano**
Embassy Suites by Hilton Minneapolis Airport
- Jose Rubio**
Hyatt Regency Bloomington - Minneapolis

**BEST HOTEL RESTAURANT
PERSONNEL**

- Adel Barbouche**
Sheraton Bloomington Hotel
- Victoria Rios**
JW Marriott Minneapolis Mall of America
- Biljana Saad**
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-
Minneapolis South
- Megan Tesmer**
Hilton Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport
- Leonna Williams**
Hyatt Regency Bloomington - Minneapolis

BEST FOOD PRODUCTION PERSONNEL

- Angela Aguirre**
Hyatt Place Minneapolis Airport-South
- John Conliffe**
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-
Minneapolis South
- Chris Cordova**
Cambria Hotel Bloomington Mall of America
- Pedro Rodriguez**
Hazelwood Food + Drink
- Piero Zolezzi**
Hyatt Regency Bloomington - Minneapolis

BEST TRANSPORTATION PERSONNEL

- Bob Bailey**
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-
Minneapolis South
- Molly Glenn**
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington-
Minneapolis South
- Kenny Lane**
Embassy Suites by Hilton Minneapolis Airport
- John Scaligia**
Hilton Minneapolis/Bloomington
- Donald Schuster**
Courtyard by Marriott Bloomington by
Mall of America

**BEST ENGINEER/MAINTENANCE
PERSONNEL**

- Ricardo Acosta**
Hilton Minneapolis/Bloomington
- Neyser Belen**
Hyatt Place Minneapolis Airport-South
- Elizabeth Kaltenhauser**
SEA LIFE at Mall of America
- Robert Niznik**
Embassy Suites by Hilton Minneapolis Airport
- Emily Perez**
SEA LIFE at Mall of America

BEST RETAIL PERSONNEL

- Robin Albus**
Mall of America
- Kinnarone Pimpadubsee**
Nickelodeon Universe
- Morgan Turner**
SEA LIFE at Mall of America
- David Wren**
Lindt Chocolate

BEST BARTENDER

- Santiago Bravo Cruz**
Cantina Laredo
- Chelsea Evans**
Hazelwood Food + Drink
- Travis Hanson**
Radisson Blu Mall of America
- James Josephs**
Courtyard by Marriott Bloomington by
Mall of America
- William Reynolds**
Hilton Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport

Diamond Service Awards

Thank you

for helping Bloomington Minnesota Travel & Tourism bring this incredible program to life. Your commitment to exceptional customer service is as evident as those we honor tonight.

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