

Nomination: Tom Mayne, Couleecap, Inc.
Outstanding Advocate Award

Tom Mayne, Energy Services Director for Couleecap, has excelled as an advocate for low-income families in Wisconsin. Tom not only articulates the needs of the community with policy makers, community stakeholders, and the public, but he inspires others within his organization and network to become advocates as well.

Tom is passionate about helping families achieve energy efficiency to reduce the burden of utility costs but what stands out about Tom is that he communicates a more comprehensive approach to serving people. For example, Tom has pushed Couleecap to think about the aging population as we developed our strategic plan, citing the number of people he has provided weatherization for that have moved to a fixed income, do not have means to care for their homes, and are at risk of not maintaining independence. He challenged the organization, by using his experience, to consider evolving situations of people in poverty when shaping future priorities.

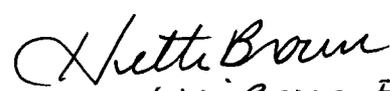
At the community and state level, Tom is a voice for rural communities that have experienced dis-investment over the years. Tom is on a road-show of sorts, speaking to state lawmakers, private funders, and community leaders about the importance of weatherization and energy programs to low-income people, carrying a large framed map that provides visual demonstration of the need and his concerns for rural Wisconsin. On his own time, Tom took this map with him to a budget listening session with newly-elected Governor Evers, Lt. Governor Barnes, and the transition team, where he explained how rural communities were worthy of investment and deserved to be given representation and consideration in public benefit allocations. Tom has given similar presentations to our Board of Directors, key stakeholders, the new WISCAP Executive Director, and community groups. After one of our Board members heard Tom speak about the importance of energy programs, he became inspired to go door-to-door in a low-income neighborhood of his own community to hand out literature about Wisconsin Energy Assistance and encourage people to sign up.

Tom also participates in groups to shape the future of Weatherization. For example, Tom participated in a national coalition to identify weatherization program best practices to share across the network and led the Energy Roundtable at a WISCAP quarterly meeting in fall, 2018. Tom is looked to as an expert in the state and uses that positions to advocate for people that are the most vulnerable in our society.

On a personal note, Tom has made me into a strong advocate for the importance of energy and weatherization investment and given me an understanding of how decisions at the state and federal level are impacting the future of these programs. When I joined Couleecap as a new executive director, I did not have prior experience in this area and could not state a natural passion for it. Since working with Tom, however, that has changed. He has enabled me to see what he sees – how weatherization, heating, and other energy assistance programs not only changes lives, but it saves lives. He is frequently in my office, sharing a new article or communication he discovered on the topic, and explaining the impact of that information on the people we serve. Sometimes he must patiently explain this to me multiple times due to the complexity of the topic but in the end, I always leave with the education and confidence I need to advocate for greater investment in rural communities at the state and federal level.

Outside of his efforts to deliver excellent results for his programs, he goes above and beyond his role to serve the greater low-income community. Tom volunteers his time to partner with the Aging and Disability Resource Center to identify households that could use assistance from volunteer services. After the devastating floods of 2018, Tom worked directly with families in need to get them emergency support, including rental support.

Tom is truly an outstanding advocate and I am proud to nominate him for this award.


Hetti Brown, Executive Director