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Best of Madison 2012: Editors' Choice

The All Star Award

>Rob Wilson

It's probably safe to say Rob Wilson's basketball career at the University of Wisconsin didn't turn out exactly as he planned. His growth as a student, a citizen and a man, on the other hand—that turned out pretty well. Wilson was a regular contributor to the Badger basketball team for about three and half seasons, never quite reaching the level of achievement that some expected. Then, about halfway through his senior year, everything changed. You could see it in his play. He was more aggressive, more confident. And suddenly there was that unforgettable conference tournament game against Indiana when he poured in thirty points and just lit up the entire gym. Then came the stories about Rob Wilson volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club, how much he meant to the kids there, his dedication and commitment to those kids and his role as mentor and teacher. Folks who know Wilson said that experience played out in his life on the court and in the classroom and that Rob Wilson blossomed. Anyone who saw the picture of Wilson and his surprise birthday cake surrounded by smiling faces of kids at the Boys and Girls Club could see it too. Jordan Taylor was the star. Mike Brusewitz was the character. Josh Gasser was the rock. Rob Wilson? He's the Best of Madison.



– Neil Heinen

Editorial Director, Madison Magazine

The Use Your Voice Award

>Fabu, Sarah Busse and Wendy Vardaman



Zhen Fabu took on the role of Madison poet laureate in 2008, she made it her mission to “put poetry in unusual places and spaces.” She published poems—her own and those of many others— in local publications, including this magazine, as well as such unique venues as Madison Metro buses. She’s written that “poetry helped me make sense of the chaotic world that I found myself growing up in,” amid racial tensions and the Vietnam War, and she’s since helped others use words for expression, understanding and healing. Fabu’s legacy continues in the work of her successors, Sarah Busse and Wendy Vardaman, who picked up the poet laureate title in January. Co-editors of poetry magazine *Verse Wisconsin*, Busse and Vardaman have proven that art holds a powerful and rightful position in current events. When protests broke out at the Capitol last winter, the editors invited writers and the community at large to submit poetry about what they were seeing, experiencing and feeling, and posted their work online. All of a sudden, “unusual” didn’t feel like the right word to describe poetry’s place in Madison. “Extraordinary” and “inspiring” are more like it.

– Katie Vaughn
 Managing Editor, *Madison Magazine*

The Stand Up for Citizenship Award

Part 1: Recall Petition Gatherers



Vtanding on street corners throughout Wisconsin during the cold winter days of November, December and January, these tens of thousands of state citizens showed their commitment to their cause and to civic life. Even those who oppose their efforts should admire their tenacity, involvement and dedication to their beliefs. Citizens on street corners talking with others about important civic issues—this is what democracy looks like.

Part 2: Verify the Recall Effort



es, some were from out of state, but the effort did involve thousands of citizens who built a searchable database of those who signed the recall petitions. While their goal may have been to prove thousands of names fraudulent, the result was otherwise. The effort needs to be recognized, though, since they did something government could not, make the petitions public in a very impressive, easy-to-understand way. The thousands of hours of work and thousands of hours of volunteer time are laudable. This, too, is what democracy looks like.

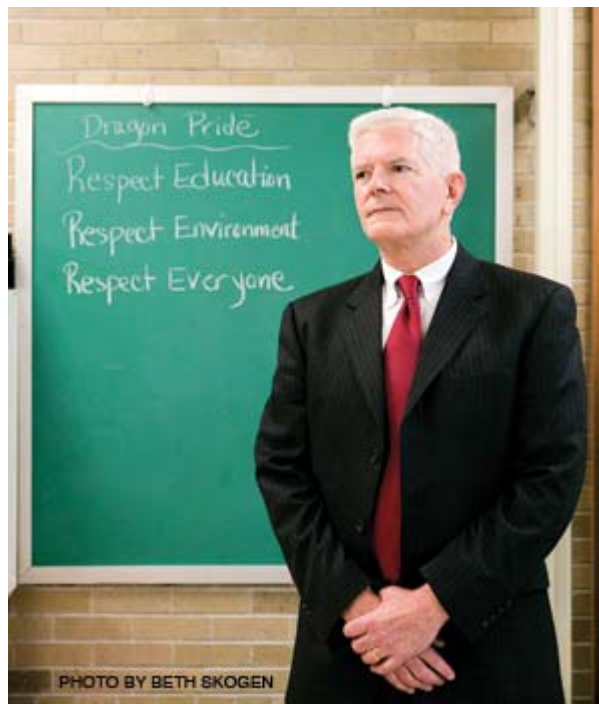
-Madison Magazine

The Voice of Reason Award

>Ed Hughes

Zhen Ed Hughes' kids were in high school, East was experiencing a rough stretch in leadership. At the time, he remembers, "It seemed to me there wasn't any institution more important to my community than East." So he joined the PTO and ever since he's been deeply engaged in public education. As a lawyer, Hughes is adept at fact-finding, interpreting budgets and conflict resolution, which serve him well as a moderate member of the Madison school board, an entity that has seen its share of challenges recently.

While Hughes isn't a big talker during school board meetings, his astute perspective on all aspects of school administration are well known and disseminated in a popular blog he's been writing since soon after he joined the board in 2008. What started out as an experiment, a way to assemble and archive the mountains of information he and his colleagues contend with, eventually became a valuable resource for his readers and a forum for his opinions.



School insiders, stakeholders, engaged citizens and the media stayed glued to the blog as the controversy surrounding Madison Prep unraveled and then came to an emotional head—and halt—at the December 2011 school board meeting. From Hughes' vantage point, we read about everything, in oft-excruciating detail, from teacher contracts to budget woes to a final plea to fellow school board members to agree to open Madison Prep once collective bargaining contracts expired. Hughes won kudos and respect for his thoughtful commentary and passionate attempt at compromise on an intractable problem: how to eradicate the racial achievement gap plaguing our youth.

"Our challenge is to do more for the many students who aren't achieving and keep our schools attractive for kids who have options."

A tough assignment, but for Hughes a realistic and rewarding one. "People say it's a thankless job, but people come up to me and thank me all the time."

– Brennan Nardi
Editor, *Madison Magazine*