

PRESS RELEASE

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Jim Walton Community Impact Award Recipients Announced at 2023 Rural Summit

The inaugural Jim Walton Community Impact Award Recipients were announced on September 6, 2023 at the 2023 Stand Up Rural America Summit held in Laurel, Mississippi.

Jim Walton, Founder of Brand Acceleration, was the consummate champion of Rural America. For his entire career he was the dreamer, the pusher, the instigator, and the believer for rural communities all across the USA. He epitomized the "can-do" spirit of those who live and work in Rural America. This award was designed to recognize other changemakers, trailblazers and catalysts who have gone above and beyond the norm to create positive change in their communities or regions. This honor will be awarded annually at the Stand Up Rural America Summit to a deserving individual, team or organization who epitomizes Jim's "going the extra mile is always worth it" attitude.

The individual, teams and organizations nominated for this award exemplified the following characteristics: Be a **Champion** of Rural America in words and actions; be a **Catalyst** for tangible growth in your community or region; be a **Supporter** of Economic Development, Community Development, Tourism Development, Workforce Development, Downtown Revitalization, Business Retention & Expansion or Entrepreneurship in your community or region; has gone "**above and beyond**" to create positive action and sustainable growth; and has displayed traits that are admirable, has honored the legacy of the community or region and is a proud **Advocate** for Rural America and all that it stands for.

We are excited to announce that **Gerri Lawing**, formerly with Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative, is the Recipient of the 2023 Jim Walton Community Impact Award. During a 15 year career with GVEC, Gerri was involved in every possible economic development facet at every level including industry recruitment, business expansion, small business development, downtown revitalization, BRE strategies, entrepreneurship and community development. She also traveled with her camera and her pen and told the stories of the cities, the businesses, the people, the land and their heritage. She was involved in both mega projects and mom & pop projects and each job created, saved or showcased meant the same to her. She is a big thinker, a dreamer and a doer. She is inquisitive, inspirational and her "let's go" attitude is always contagious. Whether traveling with the Governor to recruit global industries or having a chat with locals at a small coffee shop in one of her community, Gerri would always be equally enthusiastic, helpful, and resourceful. She has been a real catalyst for growth, both big and small. She represented the GVEC communities with great passion and commitment, but also served the State of Texas, the Texas Economic Development Council, Team Texas and Go Big in Texas as an outstanding partner and leader. It is an honor to recognize Gerri Lawing as the recipient of the 2023 Jim Walton Community Impact Award.

It is also a privilege to introduce two economic development professionals who were selected as Honorable Mention recipients of the award.

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Stacy Davis, Executive Director of the Sumner County Economic Development Commission, was selected for her innovative role in multiple initiatives. Stacy was involved in the creation of the Celebrate Sumner county-wide beautification project, the construction of the Cowley Community College Sumner Campus, the Wellington Downtown Revitalization Committee, the Sumner County Leadership Initiative and much more. She was also instrumental in developing partnerships with KansasWorks and Workforce to meet the labor demands in Sumner County. She has created co-working space, façade programs, legislative events and business promotions. She is a Master of building relationships and is always looking for positive ways to collaborate and influence growth in her region. She has transformed the economic development program in Sumner County, Kansas and multiple cities are the beneficiaries.

Brooklyn Leep, Executive Director of Marion County Economic Development, was also announced as an Honorable Mention for her tireless and enthusiastic support of economic development efforts in Marion County, Kentucky. She took an existing program and turbo-charged the initiatives to a whole new level of activity. In a short period of time, she has put Marion County, KY on the map, created dynamic outreach strategies, initiated a downtown revitalization effort for Lebanon, implemented an effort to expand infrastructure, secured land for future development, and recruited a new distillery to the county that will provide new jobs, tax base and further solidify the county's role as an important stop on the famous "Bourbon Trail" in Kentucky. She is involved in telling the story of Marion County in many ways and continues to create excitement for all things economic development in her county.

All three of these ladies are champions of Rural Economic Development. We congratulate them on their success and the positive impact they have provided to their communities and their regions.

We extend our appreciation to the nationwide group of economic development professionals and associates who served as the Jim Walton Community Impact Award Selection Committee.

For questions about the Jim Walton Community Impact Award or the Stand Up Rural America Summit, please contact Lorie Vincent at 806-683-2553.

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Pictured: Gerri Lawing, 2023 Jim Walton Community Impact Award Recipient

Pictured: Colleen Walton (Jim Walton's Daughter), Stacy Davis, Brooklyn Leep and Brad Thomas (Presenter)

Stand Up
**RURAL
AMERICA**

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**2023 JIM WALTON
COMMUNITY IMPACT
AWARD**

Gerri Lawing

**PRESENTED
SEPTEMBER 6, 2023
LAUREL, MISSISSIPPI**





