



water for people
EVERYONE • FOREVER

Kenneth J. Miller

FOUNDERS' AWARD

Honoring Water For People Champions
June 9, 2026

Presented by

Jacobs

Thank you

Water For People gratefully acknowledges our sponsors for supporting this year's Kenneth J. Miller Founders' Award Ceremony.

Presenting Sponsor



"At Water For People, actions come from the core belief that everyone should have access to clean water and sanitation services, forever. That forward-thinking approach aligns with our mission at Jacobs – Challenging Today, Reinventing Tomorrow. Water For People and Jacobs share a common vision that all people have accessible, sustainable, and safe water supplies, adequate sanitation, and live in healthy and thriving environments."

– **Rick Warner**, Water Market Strategic Leader, Jacobs

Honorary Sponsor



Program

Welcome

Jessica Carner and Julie Kauffman, Water For People
Rick Warner, Jacobs
Cheryl Porter, AWWA Past President

Water For People Overview

Mark Duey, Water For People

Kenneth J. Miller Founders' Awards Presentation

Closing Remarks



Challenging today.
Reinventing tomorrow.

We know water.

When water defines the challenge, experience and innovation make the difference. For more than 70 years, Jacobs has solved the world's most complex water challenges — delivering across the full water cycle, from rainfall to reuse.

We deliver water systems that endure because we understand water — and what it means to the people and places it serves.

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Nomination Remarks and Awardee Quotes

KEY:

AWWA: American Water Works Association

WEF: Water Environment Federation

WEA: Water Environment Association



Caroline Akerley

has been an active Water For People volunteer since she joined **Stantec** in 2020. She has led activities in the Boston office, including Pie Your Leaders, Penny Wars, Office Cookbook, 6/60k World Water Classic, and many others. Her leadership of these events has brought in at least \$2,000 every year. By 2021, she was co-leading the Stantec Annual Employee Giving Campaign in North America, and she has remained a dedicated Champion of the campaign ever since. She helps manage all components of the annual event and oversees the Local Office Champions, representing over 25 participating groups.

"I have been passionate about drinking water and sanitation access for many years. I have worked with a variety of organizations aimed at addressing water access since my time in college. Getting involved with Water For People and their Giving Campaign has, however, been the most meaningful and powerful decision I have made in my career thus far. Addressing water access is no easy feat, but Water For People has developed their impact model to be intentional, equitable, and successful in the long term. I am grateful for my impassioned colleagues, who work alongside me to fundraise and impart change in any way that we can."



Todd Bennett

has been a dedicated member of AWWA for many years. In his current roles as Committee Chair and National Director, he has strengthened the vision for **West Virginia AWWA's** full engagement in supporting Water For People and Water Equation initiatives. Through his leadership, he has inspired a renewed and heartfelt commitment within the West Virginia Section of AWWA to advance these important efforts and contribute to a meaningful, positive impact in the water sector.

"After 29 years in the Water/Wastewater market, finding solutions to keep our local water systems operational and up to date, it was important to find a way to give back. We are so blessed to have an abundance of water in our region. Serving on this Committee is a great way for us to give back through AWWA in a way that we can trust and know that it helps people that are not as blessed. I'm also on the Board of our philanthropic Foundation of my employer, to help people in the Appalachian region to have clean, viable drinking water. There is not a more important product to deliver to people in need."



Brad Buswell

Starting in 2019, Brad Buswell served as the office coordinator for **Carollo's** Workplace Giving Campaign in the Salt Lake City office, playing a key role in building awareness and participation. He actively promoted Water For People, encouraging employees to contribute through one-time and recurring donations, payroll giving, and purchase of Carollo and Water For People co-branded merchandise. He also prioritized educating staff by regularly sharing the impact of Water For People's global work, helping employees better understand how their contributions make a difference. Brad consistently kept the office informed by sharing fundraising progress and annual goals, helping maintain momentum throughout each campaign. In addition to standard fundraising efforts, Brad introduced a creative and highly successful soda program, where employees could purchase sodas for .50 cents each, with all proceeds benefiting Water For People. This initiative became a fun and effective way to boost contributions.

"It is an honor to work in the water industry and help communities provide safe drinking water and sanitation services. Water For People provides essential services to communities around the world that I couldn't help otherwise. The Water For People mission and impact around the world is inspiring and meaningful."



James Daniels

is **American Water's** Kenneth J. Miller Founders' Award winner in recognition of his exceptional leadership, unwavering dedication, and profound impact on advancing global access to clean and sustainable water.

As the driving force behind the Water For People team for the 2026 United Airlines NYC Half Marathon, James embodies the spirit of service, community, and purpose-driven leadership that this award seeks to honor.

James has not merely served on the organizing committee – he has led it with clarity, passion, and a deeply held belief that safe water is a basic human right. He consistently emphasizes that every mile run and every dollar raised is a step toward a future where all people have access to safe water. His leadership ensures that participants fully understand the “why” behind the event, creating an emotional connection that fuels long-term support.

“Water For People is important to me because I have a history of working to provide potable water around the globe prior to joining. In college, I ran a microbiology lab where we studied slow-sand water filters that were built with affordable materials. These were implemented in some villages in Africa. While my role is not as involved with the actual technical problem solving with Water For People, I am more than happy to continue devoting my time to raising funds that will directly contribute to providing clean water for Everyone Forever.”



George B. Davis

Since 2015, George B. Davis, through Davis & Davis Law Offices PLC, has been a dependable sponsor of **Michigan WEA** committee fundraisers. He knows the importance of clean and safe water and is willing to do more than his share to help Water For People lead the way.

“As an environmental and water law attorney, I have spent most of my career helping public water resource recovery facilities deliver safe water and sanitation services to the communities they serve – work that has given me a deep appreciation for how much human health and dignity depend on getting these essentials right. Water For People matters to me because it advances those goals on a global scale, bringing access to safe water and sanitation services to communities where the legal frameworks, infrastructure, and resources that are often taken for granted simply don’t yet exist – a reminder that access to safe water and sanitation is not a privilege but a basic human right. Receiving this award is a

genuine honor and a heartening affirmation that the values underlying a career in environmental/water law can resonate far beyond any single location or jurisdiction. Thank you!"



Seth Dobyns

The mission of Water For People is to end the world's water crisis for Everyone Forever and this year's **Kentucky/Tennessee AWWA's** award recipient, Seth Dobyns, has been a remarkable asset to the Water For People Committee for over six years. Seth has committed his entire 14 year working career to the water industry and has been able to leverage connections across both the drinking water and clean water industries and to encourage clients, coworkers, friends, and acquaintances to financially support Water For People. As many have experienced personally, Seth is able to use his charm, competitive spirit, and connectedness to convince anyone to donate and support Water For People. Every year at our regional Water Professionals Conference, Seth can often be easily seen, and heard, throughout the exhibit hall, shaking hands, laughing, making friends with everyone, and delicately balancing responsibilities between the Water For People and Guthrie Sales and Service booths.

Over the past two years as Water For People Committee Chair, Seth has showcased his ability to lead and unite a diverse team to help work us toward a world where every person has access to reliable and safe water. As evidenced through the effective planning of numerous Water For People's fundraising events, Seth is the unrivaled director of getting everyone involved, bringing in new members, being the master of ceremonies, and keeping everyone on track with the ever-looming threat of rain on his golf tournament parade.

"Water For People is important to me because most of my life I have taken clean water for granted and this organization gives great prospective on how lucky we are to have access to such a valuable recourse, while also making the world a better place."



Leah Ervin

joined the **Arizona Water Association's** Water For People Committee when they were looking for an event champion to organize the Run for World Water 5K. She immediately jumped into the role and has led the coordination for the past four years. She enjoys running, and is a member of a run club. That personal passion has been reflected in the success and growth of the 5K over the past several years. Since joining, she also has taken on the role of Treasurer, Vice Chair, and now is Chair of the Committee.

"Water For People is meaningful to me because it demonstrates the fact that any amount of change can happen when communities are empowered with knowledge, resources, and a shared purpose. I see a strong parallel to my work at Black & Veatch in Arizona, where multidisciplinary teams collaborate to support resilient water and wastewater systems. In the same way, Water For People brings together a broad community of local partners who might not otherwise work together toward a shared mission. Through this collective effort, we are able to support Water For People in building healthier communities and making a lasting difference for those they serve."



Judy Gripp

was a consistent volunteer on the **Indiana AWWA** Water For People Committee for many years. She assisted with the 5k Run and stepped up to revive the Silent Auction committee in 2019 when it needed a new chairperson. Under her leadership, the auction successfully contributed to the annual amount the Committee donates to Water For People. She helped transition the event to a raffle format before handing over the reins in 2023 before she retired.

Judy's efforts are heartfelt. Her steadfast dedication and tireless work on the auction each year was based on her belief in the mission of Water For People, not for personal recognition or accolades.

"Water is fundamental to life. Water For People is essential in that it combines technical and financial resources to come up with solutions to meet the needs of people in ways that can be sustained for the long term. It is inspiring that people with expertise and will can come together to help make a difference."



Taima Kayali

is being recognized for her exceptional dedication and leadership in coordinating the **Florida Section AWWA** Region III Wine for Water silent auction from 2022 to 2025. During this time, she devoted countless hours to organizing the event, building relationships with local vendors, and securing a wide range of donated items that made the auction a success year after year. Taima led a team of volunteers through both the extensive preparation and the day-of event logistics, ensuring everything ran smoothly and seamlessly. Her commitment, organization, and ability to motivate others helped deliver Region III's largest silent auction event and significantly contributed to the overall success of Wine for Water.

"Water For People matters to me because it takes a tangible and sustainable approach to providing one of the most basic human rights: access to safe, reliable water and sanitation to communities in need. Clean water is often taken for granted, yet its absence affects every aspect of a community's well-being. It's not only essential for human life, but also closely linked to education, and economic opportunity. When communities have dependable, sustainable water systems, children are more likely to stay in school, families can concentrate on building stable livelihoods, and overall quality of life is improved. Getting involved with Water For People is a meaningful way to volunteer in support of a resource that many people often take for granted."



Sharmeela R. Khemlani

has been a constant in the planning for the **Florida Section AWWA** Region IV fundraising event each year and consistently reminds all involved to put the focus on Water For People's mission. She not only supports the organization through planning, but through her advocacy for ending the world water crisis, which she shares with others in the industry and beyond.

Sharmeela embodies what the Miller Founder's Award was created to honor – a servant leader whose passion for water is matched only by her devotion to the people it touches. Her hands-on involvement, her advocacy, and her unwavering belief that clean, reliable water transforms communities makes her not just deserving of this award, but a living example of its purpose.

"As an immigrant and a minority, I come from countries where the scarcity of access to and availability of clean water is felt acutely. Connecting people to clean water and sanitation on a worldwide scale through Water For People has been one of the most rewarding and important partnerships of my life to-date. I'm honored and humbled to have my efforts recognized."



Amy Lambert

As a Vice President and EA's Director of Communications, Amy Lambert continually provides her time and effort to **EA Engineering, Science, and Technology, Inc., PBC's** Water For People Workplace Giving program. She is always quick to help draft and share messages with staff about EA's fundraising events. Her guidance supporting communications, streamlining announcements, and maintaining transparent information with staff strengthens EA's Workplace Giving program. Amy often volunteers at events, from Summer Photo Contests to Plant Sales, and leads outreach in the focused payroll donation campaign from World Water Day to Earth Day.

"Supporting Water For People is important to me because something as basic as clean water shouldn't determine a person's health, education, or future. As someone working within the environmental consulting field and personally passionate about sustainability, I care about building communities that are both resilient and equitable. Reliable and safe access to water and sanitation is at the heart of that."



Josh Marlin

a Project Manager at McKim & Creed, has been a committed and impactful volunteer for Water For People for many years. His deep commitment to the cause and his leadership within the **North Carolina Water For People Committee** have made a lasting impact on both the organization and the people who work alongside him.

Josh has served in multiple leadership roles on the Committee and is best known as the driving force behind the annual Charlotte 5K fundraiser. Under his guidance, the event has grown significantly in both participation and fundraising success—a direct reflection of the time, energy, and care

he puts into every detail of the race. His fellow volunteers consistently praise his calm demeanor, sharp attention to detail, and supportive leadership style. What sets Josh apart is his ability to lead with both confidence and humility. He brings a laid-back, reassuring presence that eases the pressure on others, reminding his team that while challenges are inevitable, they're always manageable. His perspective helps keep things in balance, and his consistent, can-do attitude is a source of confidence for everyone involved.

Josh's contributions go far beyond logistics. He brings heart, humor, and a deep commitment to service that embodies the spirit of Water For People. His systems-oriented approach ensures that the event runs smoothly year after year, supported by thoughtful planning, smart delegation, and just the right amount of coordination. Josh never hesitates to roll up his sleeves—taking on tasks large and small, from logistical coordination to errands that others might find inconvenient. His quiet dedication and selflessness have inspired those around him and made a meaningful difference to the Committee's success.

"There are many ways to contribute to progress in developing countries, but building and sustaining infrastructure requires more than money – it requires institutions, networks, and leaders – all of which Water For People helps develop and support. In my local community, volunteering with Water For People has been a fun and effective way for me to connect with people in the water industry and create community through our events. People are always smiling and laughing at our events, and that brings me joy!

Ultimately, Water For People has helped me broaden how I think about 'the water profession' – our community is international, and it can be easy to forget that when our day-to-day lives focus on our local projects. Water For People enables water professionals to share their skills, knowledge, and resources to achieve its mission – water for everyone, forever. I want to be a part of that."



Christopher Mata

Over the past several years, Christopher Mata has dedicated time and leadership to the **Virginia AWWA Water For People Committee**. He has spent the past two years serving as vice chair and stepped into the role of Committee chair in October 2025. When Chris became chair, he did so without anyone filling the positions of Vice Chair, Secretary, and various other sub-committee leadership roles. The Committee is organized through sub-committees that plan special events, golf tournaments, workplace giving campaigns, a 5k at AWWA's WaterJAM, and a booth at WaterJAM that helps raise funds. With many important sub-committee roles not filled, Chris truly stepped up to the plate with determination and has gone above and beyond with his time to the Committee.

Since October, Chris has helped schedule and organize sponsorships for two annual golf tournaments, plan the first ever Virginia Water For People luncheon, and is helping to plan the Social Splash at ACE in June. In addition, Chris has hosted monthly Committee meetings and attended orientation meetings to onboard new Committee members. Over the past few months, more volunteer positions on the Committee have been filled, but the strong start in the first quarter of 2026 is most certainly due to Chris's efforts and organization.

"Water For People is important to me because it aligns closely with my professional career values. Throughout my career, I've worked to serve local communities by delivering water and wastewater capital projects that strengthen infrastructure and improve quality of life. Through my involvement with the Virginia Chapter of Water For People, I've had the opportunity to extend that impact globally, even in a small way. I deeply value Water For People's commitment to working hand-in-hand with communities and embedding sustainable solutions that deliver lasting results. Knowing that these efforts help ensure clean water and sanitation for current and future generations makes me proud to support such an impactful organization."



Heather Oakes, P.E.

Brown and Caldwell is proud to nominate Heather Oakes, P.E., for the Kenneth J. Miller Founders' Award in recognition of her outstanding leadership and commitment to the company's Workplace Giving campaign. Heather first served as an office champion, where she significantly increased engagement through creative and personal approaches, including baking homemade pies for a Pi Day fundraiser to support Water For People. Eight months ago, Heather stepped into the Recruitment Leader role and quickly made a meaningful impact. She actively listened to champion feedback, successfully recruited and filled all open positions within her first 30 days, and launched regional champion mixers to connect volunteers across the company. She has strengthened collaboration, built camaraderie, and empowered others to take ownership and lead with confidence. Heather's passion, initiative, and ability to inspire others exemplify the values of the Founders' Award.

"I returned to school at 38 to pursue an engineering degree because I wanted to contribute in a meaningful, responsible way to work that supports equity and human dignity in developing communities. As I committed myself to understanding what it means to help without causing harm, I came to see that one of the most practical uses of my privilege is to share WHY this work matters with people who already value the WHAT—and to listen and learn before presuming to explain the HOW.

As I continue investing in this organization and building relationships with others who share these values, I feel both supported and motivated to help support others in return. Real, lasting change is built slowly on trust and shared effort. Each of us is capable of courage in the right moment, and together our contributions can create impact that extends well beyond ourselves."



Katie Overstreet

has been in our industry for over a decade. She started volunteering at the **Texas AWWA and WEA Texas Water For People Golf Tournament** in San Antonio and has remained a steadfast presence ever since. The Golf Tournament has raised over \$600,000 since its inception, thanks to volunteers like Katie.

In 2019, Katie focused on the creation of a new event, Bingo For Bags, spreading the message of Water For People to individuals outside of the water industry in the San Antonio area. She chaired the event for several years, held various key positions, and also served with the shopping group to purchase prizes for the 20 rounds of bingo at the event. This event has raised almost \$70,000 for Water For People through 2025.

"Working in public utility operations in San Antonio, Texas, I see every day how safe, reliable water service protects public health and strengthens communities. Water For People is important to me because it advances that same mission globally—building sustainable, locally owned systems that reflect the responsibility and values of public service we strive for at home."



Maika Pellegrino

has been selected as the **Jacobs'** award recipient in recognition of her exceptional dedication, leadership, and meaningful contributions over the past two years. As an Employee Giving Campaign Co Chair, she plays a pivotal role in driving the success of Jacobs' annual Water For People giving efforts.

Through her organization and communication, Maika has strengthened employee engagement and elevated the visibility and impact of the campaign. Her commitment has been instrumental in increasing participation, enhancing outreach, and deepening Jacobs' overall contributions to Water For People.

Maika's passion, dedication, and ability to inspire others truly embody the spirit of service and leadership this recognition is intended to honor. Her efforts have made a lasting difference—both within Jacobs and in advancing the mission of Water For People—making her a truly deserving recipient of this award.

“Water For People is important to me because it focuses on creating lasting access to clean water and sanitation, not just short-term solutions. I have personally seen what it means for individuals and communities to live without access to safe water and proper sanitation, and that experience has given me a deep understanding of how essential these services are to health, dignity, and opportunity. I’m especially drawn to Water For People’s commitment to sustainability, local partnership, and accountability—working alongside communities to build systems that are owned, maintained, and sustained for the long term.”



Gwendolyn Rodriguez

has been involved with **Hazen and Sawyer’s** Workplace Giving Committee since its very inception, and her commitment to Water For People has not wavered. From the earliest days of the committee, she has been a steady and passionate advocate for the organization’s mission, helping to build not only a successful program, but a lasting culture of service within the New York office and across the firm.

What sets Gwen apart is not just the time she has given, but the way she has given it. She leads by example. Through her enthusiasm and persistence, she has helped grow awareness of Water For People and has inspired her colleagues to become engaged. Beyond committees and campaigns, Gwen reflects the deeper values that define the Kenneth J. Miller Founders’ Award. She demonstrates humility, generosity, and a sincere belief in the importance of service. Her dedication is not motivated by recognition, but by a genuine desire to support Water For People’s mission and ensure its success for the long term.

Her leadership, enthusiasm, and generosity have inspired colleagues firmwide to engage, contribute, and believe that even small efforts can create lasting change.

“Water For People is deeply meaningful to me because it brings together people across geographies and industries, unifying communities, partners and volunteers around an issue that will always require thoughtful stewardship: access to clean water. This organization has given me the opportunity to help raise awareness,

contribute to real change, and support one of the planet's most precious and finite resources. It is also a powerful reminder that each of us can play a role in addressing the water crisis, creating impact one ripple at a time through authentic, local actions that can ultimately drive meaningful change at scale."



Michelle H. Schofield

While still relatively new to the water industry, Michelle H. Schofield joined the **Kentucky/Tennessee Section AWWA** staff in 2018 as the Member Services Coordinator and Staff Assistant. Michelle has gone above and beyond in her normal job, even taking on web design and coding in the implementation of the Section's new website.

Michelle has been active behind the scenes supporting KY/TN AWWA's Water For People Committee since her first day on the job. She has been involved with coordinating every in-person and virtual event over the last six years. Michelle has supported the transitions of four different Committee chairs, sharing her institutional knowledge freely with everyone. From creating event websites, running sign-ups and payments, sending event email blasts, and helping manage the yearly finances for the Committee, she has been involved in every behind-the-scenes detail, largely going unseen and unrecognized. Her dedication to quality and service has allowed for the continued success of KY/TN golf tournaments, bowling tournaments, corn hole tournaments, and virtual game nights. Michelle is always willing to help no matter what is needed. Her passion for service extends beyond the Section's volunteers to a broader mission of helping make clean, safe drinking water accessible to communities around the world.

"This organization brings out the very best in water professionals. No matter if there are competing firms; rival utilities; small, medium or large organizations, everyone rallies about bringing water to people.

You can't argue the mission, the cause, or the reason we do what we do. It's at the very heart of life."



Jennifer Welsch

has selflessly volunteered for the **Missouri AWWA and WEA Water For People Committee** for many years. Without her support, MWEA and MO-AWWA could not have been nearly as successful as they have. She has volunteered countless hours, all in support of providing safe drinking water where it wouldn't otherwise be available. Her actions have undeniably had a global impact and continue to inspire those around her in Missouri.

"Water is essential; our bodies depend on it for nearly every function. Staying healthy and preventing diseases requires access to clean, safe water, which every person deserves. Water For People focuses on long-term solutions to achieve this goal. They collaborate with communities and governments to ensure that water systems remain functional for generations, not just temporarily. By addressing water issues worldwide, Water For People is vital for providing one of the basic necessities that support a healthy life, community, and future."



Amber Whisner

Amber Whisner's passion for water is evident in both her job and her work with the **Georgia Section AWWA**. She implemented the City of Dallas' Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) in 2017. This technological advancement positioned Dallas as one of the most advanced small systems in Georgia and was a great encouragement to other small systems that they could also implement AMI technology without the revenue of larger utilities. While making these impressive advancements professionally, she also served as the Chair of the No Water No Beer event, an annual GAWWA fundraiser supporting Water For People. Although Amber is a busy person, both professionally and personally, she chooses to dedicate her time to this important cause.

"Water For People is important to me because I want to do all I can to make sure others are as fortunate to receive safe, clean water. It is also important to me to make sure we continue to educate and promote the importance of water and how much of a precious resource it is so that generations to come have the same access that we do today."

To learn more about becoming a Water For People Champion, reach out to volunteers@waterforpeople.org.



water for people

Want an active way to support Water For People? Register for the World Water Classic! Run, walk or bike to help end the walk for water that millions of people must do every day. Register online at www.runsignup.com/worldwaterclassic and participate wherever you are between October 2–11.