



January 3, 2019

Forty Under 40
Business Record
The Depot at 4th,
100 4th Street,
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

Members of the Forty Under 40 Committee,

I am writing today in support of my nominee for Forty Under 40, Matt Blake. Matt is team member of mine at LeadingAge Iowa (LAI), an association of non-profit aging services providers including retirement communities, nursing homes, assisted living programs, independent living, home health, PACE, adult day, meals on wheels, and others. Matt serves as the association's Director of Government Relations and Membership Services. In his role, he is our full-time advocate at the Iowa Capitol during the state legislative session, provides regulatory guidance for LAI members, and develops policy proposals to tackle critical issues facing aging services.

I nominate Matt Blake for his leadership in aging services to benefit older adults across the state of Iowa, his continued growth and professional development at LAI, and his admirable dedication to community service. In three short years, Matt has become one of the leading voices in Iowa on aging services. Few realize the challenges older Iowans and their families will face over the next few decades accessing the care and assistance that they desire based on their personal preferences and desires as well as finances. With shortfalls in federal and state funding and a tidal wave of baby boomers entering the system, Iowa's aging services system will undergo severe strain. Most Iowans are unaware of these looming issues as they don't encounter the problem until a loved one, often as a result of a sudden event, has a need for support and services.

Matt is one of the few voices in Iowa addressing this issue at the policy and legislative level. He was a key force in the development and hosting of the Future of Aging Services Summit that took place in 2018. The Summit sought to create a collective vision for the future of aging and aging services in Iowa and brought together legislators, associations, policy leaders, business leaders, and many more to work on a vision. Matt drafted the report regarding the Summit and is preparing next steps to help bring the vision to a reality. Additionally, Matt has positioned himself as an expert for legislators, policy makers, department staff, and others regarding the topics of funding for aging services, workforce shortfalls, and regulatory impacts on aging services.

When Matt graduated from Drake Law in 2015, he had little knowledge of aging services or working full-time in an association. Matt had an impressive resume of prior political and legal

experience, but there is a big difference between being an intern and taking on a professional role. However, Matt has grown tremendously over the last few years and become a trusted and valued member of the team. Matt is always open to new challenges and projects and has demonstrated that he is a team-player and willing to help in any way asked. Matt is just hitting his stride in the policy-making arena, and I am excited to see what next year brings for his advocacy. Finally, Matt is always up-beat and positive and has the ability to lighten the mood of any situation.

Matt continues to push the limit in service to his community. I often laugh at the sheer number of events and groups he is involved with. From his service as President of the 4th of July Celebration Committee in Urbandale, his role as a member of the board of Young Variety, his work as a Commissioner on the Urbandale Civil Rights Commission, and his weekly meetings at Toastmasters, Matt is certainly an active community member of Urbandale and the greater Des Moines area. I fully support his dedication to service and believe that his active role in the community not only benefits greater Des Moines but helps shine a light on aging services through his active participation.

The one piece of service that did impact my role as his employer and supervisor was his joining the Iowa Army National Guard. Roughly three years ago, Matt told me he was planning on joining the Army part-time as a JAG officer. I supported his decision but realized the strain it would put on the association and myself. Matt would have to leave for months of training and potentially extended periods of time to fulfill his military obligation. I admittedly was not excited about the idea of having to cover his position personally while he was gone, but I understood the importance of his service and his decision to join. LAI worked hard to help him achieve his goal to serve in the Army. I am proud to have someone on my staff so dedicated to serving others and our country. I also admired his willingness and eagerness to jump back into work immediately following his four-month leave of training.

Matt is not an average young professional. He is a leader not only in the industry we represent, but in his community. Matt is someone who meets and exceeds expectations professionally and has built upon his own family experience to become a passionate advocate for Iowa's aging and aging services. He takes on new challenges with zeal and has boundless energy for service and community which makes him an indispensable member of the greater Des Moines community. I would certainly say that we lucked out snagging him from his home state of South Dakota.

In summary, I know of few who would be more deserving of the honor of Forty Under 40 than Matt Blake and am honored to nominate him.

Sincerely,



Shannon Strickler
President/CEO
LeadingAge Iowa