

January 8, 2015

Business Record

ATTN: 40 Under 40 Nominating Committee  
100 4th Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309

Dear Nominating Committee:

While many professionals dedicate some time here and there to support civic endeavors, Tara Connolly has dedicated her career to advancing the causes of institutions and organizations vital to quality of life in central Iowa and beyond. And in my years, I've met few professionals with the unique mix of tactical and interpersonal skills possessed by Tara.

I have had the opportunity to work closely with Tara in my role on the Board of the Des Moines Area Community College Foundation. I am impressed time and again with her success in raising funds and, more importantly, at her innate ability to make friends. While her technical skills ensure she is always prepared to meet the unique challenges of working in the non-profit world, it is this comfort with others that sets Tara apart.

In her role as the head of DMACC's fundraising arm, Tara is charged with growing giving that directly impacts the opportunities afforded students. She has been overwhelmingly successful in developing a strategic direction focused on offering access to higher education for all who want to learn, and assembling a team that shares her commitment to helping grow Iowa's next generation of leaders.

Tara counts among her successes:

- An increase of 25% in annual scholarship distributions to more than \$725,000, with the goal of \$1,000,000 in distributions by 2017. This will enable DMACC to provide an opportunity for more than 1,300 students annually -- the majority of whom could not otherwise attend college -- to better themselves and harness the power of higher education.
- An expansion of corporate involvement in special events, to include growing the annual DMACC CEO Golf Tournament into an event that contributes more than to \$200,000 annually to scholarships.
- The implementation of a donor recognition process that provided for consistent and timely acknowledgement of gifts.
- An emphasis on regular communications aimed at key audiences that "tell the story" of the impact donors are having on students, services and the community as a whole.

In addition, Tara established the annual DMACC Foundation Entrepreneurship Competition. The competition is designed to recognize those who have bridged the gap between idea and entrepreneurship. The event has also played another vital role: bringing together small businesses and the DMACC community. Formalizing this partnership through an event like this - private support secured

by Tara makes possible a \$10,000 cash prize for the winner - is a win-win. It exposes growing businesses to the skilled professionals finishing their schooling at DMACC, while offering a potential foot-in-the-door at Iowa-born organizations for recent grads. It is strategic and personal. And that is what Tara is all about.

Again, the objective measures above tell just a portion of the story about Tara's leadership. The list could go on and on with statistics, strategies and impactful programs. But Tara is more than numbers; and more than the bottom line.

She is all about facilitating the match between a donor who wants to have an impact and a person in need -- whether that person be a first-generation American, a recovering addict seeking an opportunity for success, or a financially-challenged college student with a dream of becoming a successful entrepreneur.

Tara is also a leader outside the office. She is a long-time member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, a member of the Council for Resource Development, and a member of the 2013 class of the Great Des Moines Leadership Institute, where she worked with other civic minded people to renovate The Amanda the Panda House a center for grief and loss in West Des Moines.

In addition to these contributions to the community in a professional capacity, Tara is also a dedicated volunteer away from work. As a member of the Rotary Club of Des Moines, she has served in leadership roles including the Social Committee Chair, the Program Committee Chair and is in line to lead the club as President in 2016. She has been active as a Catechist and a member of the Catholic Women's League and currently serves as a troop leader with the Girl Scouts of Central Iowa in Waukee. All of these activities further illustrate Tara's passion for creating access to education and providing for central Iowans in need.

In fact, I have had the opportunity on several occasions to witness Tara "at work" with impressionable children. I have offered her Girl Scouts a personal tour of the Iowa legislature and witnessed her skill in leading by example and helping these girls grow into responsible, giving citizens. I've also been inspired by seeing Tara with this same group of girls at parades, celebrating citizenship and building character by actively engaging the community. As if that weren't enough, I know that Tara is also active in molding the hearts, minds and spirits of children as a volunteer educator at her church.

Indeed, I've been fortunate to see Tara facilitate programs and services that directly impact central Iowans in a variety of roles. As such, I urge you to consider Tara for recognition as one of the 40 best professionals under 40 years of age in Iowa.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Taylor", with a stylized, sweeping flourish extending from the end.

Rob Taylor  
House District 44  
Iowa House of Representatives