West Central Wisconsin CEO Becomes First Woman to Lead the Statewide Alliance

Eau Claire, WI — Over two dozen CEOs representing 147 sites across Wisconsin elected Karen DeSanto, CEO of West Central Wisconsin Clubs, as their statewide President in Eau Clair this week. DeSanto oversees rural clubs in Baraboo, Tomah and Reedsburg, and is the first woman elected to head the statewide alliance. Wisconsin clubs serve 157,000 youth across 57 towns and cities, and offer 2.35 million meals and snacks at no cost to kids every year.

"Wisconsin has some challenging problems, and they are not confined to big cities. Rural clubs are helping provide the solutions across the entire state," said President DeSanto. "We are building a better workforce, improving graduation rates, increasing academic standards, and preventing opioid abuse." The three most recent club sites were opened in Reedsburg, Red Cliff and Shawano. Wisconsin leads the country in youth served per population, and two-thirds of members live outside of Madison and Milwaukee.

"Karen DeSanto is a great leader, and I have the utmost respect for her as she moves us into the future," said Dan Hebel, outgoing President of the Alliance. "She is a passionate advocate for all children in Wisconsin, and will affect change on issues across the entire state."

In March of 2019, her colleagues voted Karen DeSanto as the Wisconsin CEO of the Year. She was recently honored by InBusiness Magazine with the 2019 Women of Industry Award for her work in building rural club capacity. She also received the BGCA Horizon Award this month, one of the most prestigious honors given by Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

"Whether it's getting teens to be first-job ready, responding to childhood trauma, or preventing kids from using cigarettes and opiates, we have many of the solutions to Wisconsin's top problems," added President DeSanto. "Every kid deserves a club, and every club will have a voice in the Alliance."

State CEOs also elected Greg Lemke-Rochon, CEO of the Fox Valley Clubs, as Vice-President, and approved a slate of the governing executive committee. The mission of the Boys & Girls Clubs is to ensure all young people, especially those who need us most, can reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. Every dollar invested in the state's Boys & Girls Clubs returns $12.40 in earnings and cost-savings to their communities.

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Wisconsin Clubs serve more youth than any other organization outside the public school system. For more background, visit https://www.bgcwisconsin.org/our-impact