

Request for Action
By
Board of Commissioners

Approval of Michael S. Van Leesten Memorial Awards

1. Summary of Request

This Request for Action (“RFA”) is for approval of the Spring 2021 Michael S. Van Leesten Memorial Awards. The Michael S. Van Leesten Memorial Awards support students from diverse backgrounds to pursue academic fields or careers related to the housing industry.

This awards program honors the life and work of Michael S. Van Leesten. Born and raised in Providence, Van Leesten was dedicated to improving the lives of Rhode Islanders through his business leadership, civil rights activism, and public service. He was the founder and Executive Director of Opportunities Industrialization Center of Rhode Island, a non-profit offering career coaching, job training, and support for small businesses in urban communities. Van Leesten previously served as the Chairman of RIHousing, and also held leadership positions with the NAACP, Urban League, and the Black Heritage Society.

This awards program consists of a \$5,000 scholarship for a student pursuing a construction trade career; a \$5,000 scholarship for a student pursuing an academic degree related to the housing field; and a summer fellowship for a student to develop professional experience in housing policy, research and analysis through an in-depth project.

RIHousing released applications for the awards program on March 30, 2021. The applications were posted on the RIHousing website, social media, via a press release and sent to approximately 550 organizations, trade schools and colleges, and property managers via email announcements. All material was available in both English and Spanish. RIHousing received one application for the construction trade scholarship, six applications for the academic housing scholarship and no applicants for the fellowship.

A committee consisting of staff from the Development Division, Leased Housing and Rental Services Division, Finance Division, and Jill Van Leesten, Van Leesten’s daughter, reviewed each proposal in accordance with scoring criteria. Upon review it was determined by the committee that the construction trade scholarship applicant did not meet the threshold criterion of pursuit of a career in the construction trades. As a result, the committee is recommending that two scholarships be awarded to applicants for students pursuing a degree related to housing, as described at [Attachment A](#).

2. Recommendation

Staff recommends that the resolution authorizing the Michael S. Van Leesten Memorial Awards in the amount of \$10,000 for the applicants set forth at [Attachment A](#) be approved.

3. **Attachments**

- A. Recommended scholarship awards
- B. Resolution

Attachment A

Proposed FY 2021 Michael S. Van Leesten Memorial Awards

| Name | Scholarship | Educational Program | Award |
|---------------------|------------------------|--|--------------|
| Temidayo Akinjisola | Academic Housing Award | Roger Williams University Law School | \$5,000 |
| Diana Figueroa | Academic Housing Award | Tufts University Master of Arts in Urban and Environmental Policy & Planning | \$5,000 |

Attachment B
Resolution of the Board of Commissioners
of
Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation

WHEREAS: Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation (“RIHousing”) created the Michael S. Van Leesten Memorial Awards Program in memory of Michael S. Van Leesten; and

WHEREAS: pursuant to an open competitive process RIHousing invited applications for two scholarships and one fellowship to support students pursuing education and training related to housing; and

WHEREAS: RIHousing received one application for a construction trade scholarship and six applications for an academic housing scholarship; and

WHEREAS: a committee comprised of staff and a representative of Michael S. Van Leesten’s family reviewed the applications and have determined that two applicants best fit the award criteria.

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY:

RESOLVED: that the applicants set forth at Attachment A be, and hereby are approved for scholarship awards under the Michael S. Van Leesten Memorial Awards Program in the amounts specified at Attachment A.

RESOLVED: that all funds awarded hereunder shall be funded out of the FY 2021 budget of RIHousing.

RESOLVED: that the Executive Director and the Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer, each acting singly, be and hereby are authorized and empowered to take any and all actions necessary or desirable to carry out the foregoing resolutions.