

UCP 2023 Award Recipients

UCP Chair Award

The annual Chair Award is bestowed annually on an individual who has been distinctly supportive of the Chair of United Cerebral Palsy by providing volunteer leadership and/or contributions toward UCP's mission by helping to change the lives of the people and communities we support.

Geoff Haxel is this year's recipient of the UCP Chair Award. Mr. Haxel retired in 2018 as Senior Vice President of Operations at Circle K. From 2001 to 2011, he served as Vice President of the Arizona Business Unit for the company, though he's worked for Circle K since 1988.

UCP picked Geoff to receive this year's Chair Award for the important role he played in Circle K's philanthropic support of United Cerebral Palsy affiliates in Arizona, primarily through a program that used canisters stationed near store cash registers to collect customer donations. His success with the program served as a model for similar efforts nationwide.

Geoff's career as a salesclerk at Circle K store in the Dallas/Fort Worth market. It was later when working as a regional manager in the 1990s when he was first directly exposed to the work of United Cerebral Palsy. The person in charge of development at what was then a UCP affiliate in Dallas had reached out several times to invite Geoff to visit the facility.

"This woman had tremendous passion," he said, "and she was very professional and represented UCP in a good way." Because he admired her tenacity, Geoff finally agreed to tour the facility's adult and children's care centers.

It was during a children's therapy session that Geoff became enthralled by how excitedly three moms in the room were responding to the significant, if incremental, progress their young children were making. It was only then, he said, that he began to appreciate the profound impact of the services United Cerebral Palsy provides.

Sitting in his car in the affiliate's parking lot, Geoff said he was so touched by what he'd seen that he began to weep, and vowed to do all he could going forward to support the work of United Cerebral Palsy.

"I gotta do something," Geoff said he told himself that day. "I didn't know what it is. I didn't have any money. I wasn't high up in the company, but I thought as long as I'm at Circle K I'm gonna do whatever I can to help."

As he rose through the company's ranks, Geoff said his ability to help shape its philanthropic efforts grew. After arriving in Phoenix in 2001, Geoff dedicated himself to maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of Circle K's existing canister collection program.

United Cerebral Palsy President and CEO Armando Contreras, who served for seven years as President and CEO of UCP of Central Arizona, said the contributions collected from Circle K customers on behalf of UCP of Central Arizona and Southern Arizona during Haxel's 17-year tenure in Phoenix totaled at least \$25 million. Over the years, those donations have helped support thousands of children and adults with disabilities in Arizona. Funds raised through Circle K's canister collection program were also used to support Opportunity Village in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Geoff notes that he did not develop the canister collection program but acknowledges that in his role as a top executive for Circle K he was committed to ensuring that it operated at peak efficiency.

Asked why he was so determined to make it work, Geoff said, "I guess it made me think about all of these little things that we do so effortlessly. That doesn't happen so easily for children [with disabilities]. And I'll never forget the expression I saw on the moms' faces in Dallas that day, and how special those simple moments with their children were for them."

UCP Kathy O. Maul Leadership Award

[UCP of San Luis Obispo County](#) Executive Director Mark Shaffer has been named the 2023 recipient of the Kathy O. Maul Leadership Award.

The award is presented to an exceptional affiliate executive in memory of Kathy O. Maul, the late executive director of UCP of Suffolk who left a strong legacy of leadership and commitment to UCP.

Mark's unwavering and steadfast work on behalf of UCP of San Luis Obispo County, the UCP West RAC, and UCP National deserves our highest praise, recognition and respect. His work in service of the disability community has taken UCP's mission to the highest levels of trust, accountability and productivity.

Mark is being honored by his peers not only for his accomplishments at UCP of San Luis Obispo County but his service to other affiliates by sharing his transportation program as a model for others, his willingness to coach fellow affiliates, and his unbridled enthusiasm for UCP and the Affiliate Network.

Mark grew up in Greenwich, Connecticut and attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from 1973-1977. He moved to California after graduation and settled in San Luis Obispo in 1980. He started as a van driver at a 99-bed community facility for adults with developmental disabilities. Mark became an adult education teacher at the facility and promoted community access for his students. In 1985, he formed the Community Interaction Program to provide rides and support in the evenings and weekends.

He connected with UCP of California in 1986 and began to develop other support services. Mark added respite services in 1992. He started Ride-On Transportation in 1993 to meet the social service transportation needs of seniors, people with disabilities, veterans and low-income residents in San Luis Obispo County. Ride-On has also developed transportation options for the general public such as vanpools, wedding shuttles and airport shuttles.

UCP of San Luis Obispo became an affiliate in 1994. Mark served as the West RAC Chair from 2008-2010 and continues to serve on the Affiliate Services Committee and Bellows Committee. He has two sons and four grandchildren who live in San Luis Obispo County.

Congratulations Mark! Thank you for leading with passion and professionalism and for being such an integral part of the United Cerebral Palsy family.

The award will be presented to Mark on May 2 at the [2023 UCP Annual Conference in Las Vegas](#).

UCP Legislative Award

The UCP annual Legislative Award goes to an elected or appointed official who through their commitment and public service helps support our organization's advocacy efforts on behalf of the disability community to improve the lives of people with disabilities and ensure that they are treated with respect as full and equal members of our society.

Cathy McMorris Rodgers represents the State of Washington's 5th Congressional District. First elected to the House in 2004, she currently serves as the chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Prior to this appointment, McMorris Rodgers served as chair of the House Republican Conference from 2012 to 2018. She was the 200th woman ever elected to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives and the first woman to give birth three times while in office.

In 2007, she gave birth to Cole Rodgers. Cole was born with an extra 21st chromosome and inspired the congresswoman to become a leader in the disabilities community. McMorris Rodgers is married Brian Rodgers, a retired 26-year Navy Commander.

Among her many achievements since entering Congress, Rep. McMorris Rogers is the author of the ABLE to Work Act, which allows a beneficiary who earns income for a job to save up to the federal poverty level, which is currently at \$11,770, in addition to their annual contribution limit of \$14,000.

She sponsored the ABLE Financial Planning Act, which allows for rollovers from a 529 to a 529A account, but still maintains the annual contribution limit of \$14,000.

Congresswoman McMorris Rogers was also the sponsor the ABLE Age Adjustment Act, which raises the age limit for eligibility to open an ABLE account from age 26 to 46 and increases the age limit allowing access to ABLE accounts for individuals who may face debilitating conditions, accidents or mental illnesses later in life, multiple sclerosis, Lou Gehrig's disease, and paralysis or other ailments due to an accident.

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