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## **BGR MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **BGR Announces 2022 Excellence in Government Award Winners**

Today, the Bureau of Governmental Research announces the recipients of its 2022 Excellence in Government Awards. This program honors outstanding efforts by public employees and private citizens to improve government in the New Orleans area.

BGR will recognize 10 individual or team honorees at a luncheon at the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel on October 6, 2022. Canal Barge Company, Inc., is sponsoring the awards program.

Since launching the program in 1994, BGR has given more than 150 awards to government employees and citizens. Often, the honorees carry out their work without public attention or an expectation of recognition, said BGR President and CEO Becky Mowbray.

“The Excellence in Government Awards give BGR the opportunity to shine a light on people whose outstanding efforts have improved the quality of government in our area,” Ms. Mowbray said. “As a private organization that pursues the same goal, we appreciate the daily commitment and dedication that it takes.”

BGR is recognizing several of the 2022 honorees for their responses to the extraordinary difficulties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Ida. In addition, two honorees led improvements in their roles at the New Orleans Police Department and the Sewerage and Water Board, agencies that face significant operational challenges.

“This year’s group of award winners demonstrates how dedication, persistence and a commitment to excellence can lead to positive results even in difficult situations,” Ms. Mowbray said. “Individual efforts can make a difference.”

A committee of BGR board members selected the honorees, listed below, through a competitive process. BGR solicited nominations from government officials and employees and the public in four categories.

The honorees, by category, are:

The **Lifetime Achievement Award**, which recognizes sustained performance during a public employee's career, will be presented to:

- **Robert Graham, Jr.**, director of operations of the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway Bridge, for his outstanding career of public service to the Greater New Orleans Expressway Commission.
- **Leslie Long**, chief financial officer, St. Tammany Parish Government, for her outstanding career of public service to St. Tammany Parish.

The **Merit Award**, which recognizes outstanding performance by public sector employees from January 1, 2020, to June 30, 2022, will be presented to:

- **Waldeen Mitchell**, customer service manager for the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans, for her management of the agency's customer service call center through Hurricane Ida and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **St. Charles Parish Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness Employees**, for their responsiveness to Hurricane Ida and the COVID-19 pandemic and for their extensive preparations for weather emergencies, industrial emergencies, and other incidents. The group of employees includes **Jason Tastet**, current department director, **Joe Ganote**, former department director, **Kristi Bernard**, **George Dugas**, **Lee Hebert**, **James Kokemor**, **Jim Polk**, **Steve Sirmon**, **Brandon Touchard**, **Michael Tregre**, and **Eric Zammit**.
- **Bryan Wallace**, chief administrative officer, City of Harahan, for his efforts to secure funding to repair and upgrade the city's sewer system, promote economic development, and coordinate recovery and business assistance efforts after Hurricane Ida.
- **Ira Wilson**, principal, Strehle Community School, Jefferson Parish Public School System, for her efforts to improve this alternative school's academic performance and student outcomes.

The **Innovation Award**, which recognizes public employees who have implemented creative solutions to pressing problems since July 1, 2017, will be presented to:

- **Tiffany Delcour**, chief operations officer, NOLA Public Schools, for her work to develop innovative and timely responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including a citywide meal program to serve students during school closures and partnerships between schools and testing, vaccine and other health care providers.
- **St. Charles Parish Assessor's Office Employees**, for their design and implementation of a rapid, accurate process for reviewing all residential and commercial property for Hurricane Ida storm damage and their timely completion of a parishwide reassessment. The group of employees includes: **Timothy Vial**, chief deputy assessor, **Cathy Albanese**,

**Alicia Bustamante, Constance Carter, Gregory Champagne, Jr., Fay Christen, Alayna Cunningham, Mary Griffin, Clyde Jackson, Tania Joseph, Kori Matherne, April Noel, Joe Otilio, Hayden Petit, Bruce Pitre, David Pizzolato, Ashley Plaisance, Angeline Singleton and Harry Zeller.**

- **Rachelle Thomas**, social services unit supervisor, New Orleans Police Department Special Victims Division, for implementing several initiatives during the past five years to provide social services to survivors of sex crimes, domestic violence and child abuse.

**The Citizenship Award**, which recognizes private citizens who have worked to improve the quality of government. The award will be presented to:

- **Andrea Neighbours**, board member, New Orleans Public Library, for her role in defeating a 2020 tax proposal that would have significantly cut library funding and passing a subsequent proposal that will allow the library to implement a new strategic plan.

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*BGR is a private, nonprofit, independent research organization. Since its founding in 1932, it has been dedicated to informed public policy-making and the effective use of public resources in the Greater New Orleans area. For more information, call (504) 525-4152 or visit BGR's website, [www.bgr.org](http://www.bgr.org).*