



2025 Awards Nominations

Excellence in Nonprofit

This award recognizes the non-profit organization that demonstrates effectiveness in meeting their mission as well as their creative and innovative ideas in moving their mission forward to benefit the community of Genoa.

CASA DeKalb County

I am honored to nominate CASA DeKalb County for the Excellence in Nonprofit Award. CASA demonstrates a profound effectiveness in meeting its mission by providing life-changing advocacy for children in our community. Their creative approach to fundraising and community engagement ensures that the needs of vulnerable children remain a priority in our community. As someone who volunteers for their events, I have seen the innovation they bring to moving their mission forward. Their work is essential for the health and future of our community, and their dedication to benefiting the children of our community is truly unmatched.

Genoa Public Library

Genoa Public Library exceeds the mission of supporting and enriching the lives of community members.

The Genoa Public Library's mission is to "cultivate personal and intellectual growth providing information, experiences, and materials that support and consistently enrich lives of all ages in our community." This enables all to learn, create and connect." Values such as "inclusion, access, intellectual freedom, customer service, innovation, integrity, respect and excellence" is all part of the strong foundation that has been built by an essential nonprofit resource in the community.

The important key factor of such an exceptional nonprofit Genoa Public Library is the leadership and staff who truly invest and care enough to provide whatever they can to the community.

It goes beyond the walls of the library.

Reaching out to schools, community services (ie tax forms), authors, special speakers, themes for kids (ie. history of prehistoric dinosaurs), safety specialists (Safe Haven), Health Department Outreach, adult crafts, special clubs (ie. craft and chat), elder care, story time, summer reading rewards and incentives, Safe Passage, ongoing youth volunteer opportunities to name a few. All nonprofit resources.

The Library's Inventor's Lab involving an amazing alliance with a profit organization such as Custom Aluminum which promotes STEM programs has established rapid growth and successful collaboration with school aged children, families, employees and volunteers (adult and youth), vocational specialists. All supporting nonprofit.

The Genoa Public Library is a nonprofit resource which embraces all and is essential to the heart of our community.

All of the above mentioned adheres to the exceptional theme of this year's Chamber Award's dinner and befitting of the nonprofit nomination.

Thank you for this opportunity.

The Genoa-Kingston Education Foundation

The Genoa-Kingston Education Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the teachers, staff and students of the Genoa-Kingston School District. Public engagement, community support, and adequate resources are essential to the success of public education. The organization is funded through private donations and fundraisers and the board is solely volunteer based. The organization awards mini-grants every fall for GK 424 staff to enhance the education for our students. Last year the organization awarded over \$13,000 in grant money. Past awards have included classroom pedal desks, research data bases, digital cameras, sensory bins, light tables, translation devices and more! The goal of the mini-grants is to support GK 424 staff with additional funds for resources that will support the students' learning success. The mission is to provide funding to enhance educational programming in the Genoa-Kingston school district. They also create and build a lasting source of revenue to not only benefit the Genoa-Kingston School District but benefit our children who will one day become the strong leaders of our community.

Goodfellows of Genoa Kingston

We chose this non-profit entity because they focus their efforts on providing new clothing and shoes to school-aged children in the Genoa-Kingston area at Christmas time. This aligns with their mission to support families in need during the holiday season by ensuring children have appropriate clothing. Since the Goodfellows organization started, it has been reported that more than 900 children have received gifts, and the Genoa chapter has only increased that amount. There has been a high level of volunteer work we've seen through shopping, wrapping, and other volunteer efforts. They typically raise funds through direct donations from individuals and community members, but most importantly, through their creative, festive dueling piano fundraiser held during the month of November.

Habitat for Humanity of DeKalb County

I would like to nominate Habitat for Humanity of DeKalb County (HFHDC) for recognition. HFHDC continues to grow and consistently meets its goals each year, building and renovating homes for communities like Genoa and Kirkland. I have personally participated in their volunteer program, including the relocation of a 100+ year-old home from the DeKalb County Museum in Sycamore to DeKalb. That home now provides a safe place for a single mother and her child.

Looking ahead to 2026, my team and I are excited to once again volunteer with HFHDC in building or renovating a home in Genoa, bringing beauty to the surrounding neighborhood, and helping place another deserving family into a home. It is truly inspiring to see what HFHDC can accomplish for our county and its residents—beautifying the community and making dreams come true—especially given their limited budget and the many dedicated volunteers who step up to help.

I truly believe DeKalb County and its residents are fortunate to have HFHDC and I'm extremely proud to be part of such a great non-profit organization.

Thank you for considering this nomination.

Opportunity House, Inc.

For over 60 years, Opportunity House (OH) has provided essential services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, serving more than 180 individuals in the past year alone. Services include support of approximately 70 individuals in eleven community-based group homes (the 2 newest in Genoa), as well as individualized assistance for people living independently throughout the community. Opportunity House is one of DeKalb County's largest nonprofit employers, with a dedicated staff of more than 130 employees.

The Opportunity House Day Services program offers classroom instruction, vocational training, and meaningful daily activities. Recreation and Special Olympics programs further promote community inclusion through local event participation, athletics, and social engagement, fostering confidence, connection, and lifelong friendships. OH athletes have earned numerous achievements through Special Olympics Illinois, further highlighting the organization's commitment to empowerment and inclusion.

Community engagement is a cornerstone of Opportunity House's mission. Clients and Staff regularly volunteer with Meals on Wheels, the YMCA, the local animal shelter, Rooted for Good, and other community partners. Opportunity House collaborates with local employers to create supported employment opportunities, and has developed Learning for Life, a multi-level life skills and personal development program, in partnership with Kishwaukee College. OH also hosts and participates in community events, including an annual Art Exhibition, Watermelon Explosion, Band Together, the Pumpkin Festival, and many others. Opportunity House was again awarded a prestigious 3-Year CARF Accreditation (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) last year, the highest level awarded, reflecting excellence in service delivery and organizational performance, and is fully licensed by the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities.

Opportunity House assists more than 180 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities - and their families – to access critical social, vocational, educational, and community integration opportunities every day.

Opportunity House, Inc.

Organization Overview, www.ohinc.org

Opportunity House, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that has served DeKalb County for more than 60 years, empowering adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to live, work, and thrive in homes of their choice while actively participating in community life.

Opportunity House provides a comprehensive range of services including residential support, community day services, supported employment, recreation and athletics, and

Special Olympics—helping individuals build independence, confidence, and meaningful connections throughout the communities they call home, including Genoa. We have two new construction homes in Genoa.

Impact in the Genoa Community

Opportunity House maintains a strong and visible presence in Genoa through residential services, community engagement, and partnerships with local businesses and organizations. The organization works intentionally to foster inclusion by ensuring individuals with I/DD are not only supported, but welcomed and valued as neighbors, employees, volunteers, and community members.

Families in Genoa rely on Opportunity House for stable housing, skill development, and opportunities that allow their loved ones to remain connected to the community they know and love. Through everyday engagement shopping locally, participating in events, and building relationships. Opportunity House contributes to the social and economic vitality of Genoa.

Leadership & Innovation

In response to the State of Illinois Dignity in Pay / Dignity in Work Act, Opportunity House has taken a leadership role in transforming services to prioritize community-integrated employment. This shift creates meaningful employment pathways that benefit individuals with I/DD while supporting local employers seeking dependable, supported workers. Looking ahead, Opportunity House is advancing plans for a Workforce Development & Training Center, which will expand job readiness, life skills, and employment training opportunities further strengthening partnerships with businesses across DeKalb County, including those in Genoa.

Community Partnership & Stewardship

Opportunity House is deeply committed to transparency, accountability, and community collaboration. The organization has earned the Candid Gold Seal of Transparency, reflecting best practices in governance and stewardship, and works closely with municipalities, chambers, service clubs, and local businesses to build inclusive opportunities for all.

Why Opportunity House Deserves Recognition

Opportunity House embodies the spirit of the Genoa Chamber of Commerce by:

- Strengthening community inclusion and quality of life
- Supporting families and individuals who live in Genoa
- Partnering with local businesses and organizations
- Demonstrating long-term commitment, adaptability, and leadership

Through its mission-driven work, Opportunity House helps ensure Genoa remains a welcoming and inclusive community where everyone has the opportunity to belong and succeed.

Conclusion

Opportunity House, Inc. is a trusted nonprofit partner and a valued contributor to the Genoa community and DeKalb County as a whole. Its decades of service, continued innovation, and deep local impact make it highly deserving of recognition by the Genoa Chamber of Commerce.

Rooted for Good (formerly DeKalb County Community Gardens)

I am pleased to nominate Rooted for Good, formerly known as DeKalb County Community Gardens, for the Genoa Area Chamber of Commerce Non-Profit Award in recognition of its meaningful and measurable impact on the Genoa community and greater DeKalb County. Rooted for Good directly addresses food insecurity by growing and distributing fresh, healthy produce to families and individuals in need, including residents of Genoa. Through garden sites serving the Genoa area, the organization annually grows thousands of pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables that are donated to local food pantries, meal programs, and community partners, ensuring access to nutritious food for those who might otherwise go without.

The organization's presence in Genoa extends beyond food distribution. Rooted for Good actively engages local volunteers—students, families, civic groups, and businesses—who contribute hundreds of volunteer hours each growing season. These efforts not only increase food production but also strengthen community connections and foster a shared sense of responsibility and pride in supporting neighbors in need.

Rooted for Good also supports education and sustainability within the Genoa area by offering hands-on learning opportunities related to gardening, environmental stewardship, and healthy eating. These programs benefit participants of all ages and promote long-term awareness of food systems, wellness, and sustainable practices.

Through its tangible results, strong volunteer engagement, and unwavering commitment to service, Rooted for Good exemplifies the values celebrated by the Genoa Area Chamber of Commerce. Its work makes a lasting difference in the lives of Genoa residents and strengthens the community as a whole, making it a highly deserving recipient of this non-profit award.

Voluntary Action Center of Northern Illinois

The year 2025 marked a period of exceptional growth and community impact for the Voluntary Action Center of Northern Illinois (VAC). Most notably, VAC expanded its Meals on Wheels Program by launching a new delivery route in Genoa, which began running officially in July 2025. This expansion addressed a critical service gap for older adults and individuals with disabilities in the northernmost area of DeKalb County who were seeking reliable access to nutritious meals and daily wellness support. The creation of the Genoa route significantly increased VAC's service capacity while also strengthening the organization's presence and partnerships within the Genoa community. This expansion mobilized a diverse and committed group of local volunteers whose dedication made the route possible. Through their service, volunteers not only ensured the consistent delivery of meals, but also fostered meaningful human connections, linking neighbors to one another and providing homebound individuals with regular social interaction, reassurance, and daily wellness checks. From July through the end of 2025, Meals on Wheels served 14 clients in the Genoa area, delivering a total of 2,721 meals. Clients were offered a range of flexible meal options tailored to individual needs, including ready to eat hot meals, cold sack suppers, frozen weekend meals, and shelf stable emergency meal kits. This comprehensive approach ensured continuity of nutrition, food security, and peace of mind for some of the community's most vulnerable residents. In addition to nutrition services, VAC plays a vital role in providing transportation services in Genoa. In 2025, VAC provided a total of 4,307 rides that enabled residents to access essential services, employment, medical appointments, and community resources. One of the most notable focuses of VAC's transportation efforts was its collaboration with Opportunity House, which opened two new homes in Genoa during 2025. VAC provides ongoing transportation support for residents of these homes, helping ensure access to services and opportunities that promote

independence, stability, and community integration. The success of these expanded services was made possible through strong collaboration with local businesses and organizations that exemplify community leadership and civic engagement. Notable Genoa based partners who advanced VAC's mission includes the Genoa Park District, Old National Bank, Northwest Center for Autism at High Road School, Lloyd Landscaping, and the Genoa Chamber. These partnerships reflect a shared commitment to supporting older adults, individuals with disabilities, and the overall wellbeing of the community. Beyond organizational partnerships, numerous individuals from across the Genoa community stepped forward to support VAC through volunteer service, financial contributions, and advocacy. Their involvement supports VAC's ability to inspire collective action and create sustainable, community driven solutions to complex social needs. Through strategic expansion, meaningful partnerships, and a steadfast commitment to dignity, nutrition, and independence, the Voluntary Action Center of Northern Illinois demonstrated outstanding impact in 2025, making it a truly deserving nominee for Non-Profit of the Year.
