



Each year, Illinois LICA proudly recognizes the members and partners whose dedication, leadership, and service strengthen our Association and advance the land improvement industry. These awards honor individuals who embody the values that have defined Illinois LICA for nearly 70 years with commitment to conservation, support for fellow contractors, and a willingness to give their time, expertise, and energy for the good of the Association. Their contributions not only elevate our organization but also reinforce the strong sense of community and shared purpose that makes Illinois LICA exceptional. Please join us in honoring this year's outstanding award recipients.



Roger Watwood (second from left) receives congratulations from JULIE colleagues Kevin & Amy Chmura and Brian MacKenzie

Merit Award – Roger Watwood

Illinois LICA is proud to recognize Roger Watwood of JULIE with a 2025 Merit Award for his outstanding partnership and commitment to safe excavation practices across Illinois. Roger has long been a reliable and engaged supporter of our association, contributing through trainings, safety days, conferences, field demonstrations, and ongoing advocacy.

His practical expertise, approachable leadership, and dedication to educating contractors have strengthened the relationship between JULIE and Illinois LICA and ensured our members stay informed on best practices and regulatory updates. Roger's consistent involvement reflects both his professional excellence and his personal commitment to our mission, and we are honored to recognize him for his meaningful contributions and continued support.

Merit Award – David & Lori Kennedy

Illinois LICA is pleased to honor David and Lori Kennedy with a 2025 Merit Award for their steady involvement, hospitality, and long-standing support of the association. Known for their willingness to step up whenever needed, the Kennedys contribute through leadership roles, committee work, and hands-on assistance at events.

Most recently, they opened their shop to host a membership drive in Area 4, welcoming members and guests while promoting shop safety and the value of ILICA membership. Their generosity, reliability, and commitment to strengthening our community have made them invaluable to the association. Illinois LICA proudly recognizes David and Lori Kennedy for their ongoing dedication and service.



Lori & David Kennedy being recognized by Veronica Seevers (left) during the awards banquet.



Charlie Schafer, Agri Drain Corporation

Innovator Award – Charlie Schafer

Illinois LICA is proud to honor Charlie Schafer as the 2025 Innovator Award Recipient.

Starting in 1976 with a small trenching business in Iowa, Charlie helped transform the industry, first by manufacturing the products contractors needed, then by building one of the most influential drainage product companies in North America, Agri Drain Corporation.

His patented systems for managing water, reducing nutrient loss, and improving water quality are now used across the U.S. and internationally. Beyond his inventions, Charlie has been a driving force in scaling up conservation practices through his leadership in LICA, ADMC, NACD, and

partnerships with federal and state agencies.

In 2010, he expanded his impact again by founding Ecosystem Services Exchange, a company dedicated to technical assistance and conservation system design, bringing his vision for healthier water and more profitable farms full circle.

A member, leader, and nationally recognized conservation champion, Charlie has earned numerous honors, including the NACD Friend of Conservation Award, Ducks Unlimited’s Conservation Excellence Award, the NASDA Public-Private Partnership Award, and induction into the International Drainage Hall of Fame. Illinois LICA is honored to recognize Charlie’s lifelong commitment to the stewardship and future of conservation drainage.



Tyler Seals (right) receives congratulations from Awards Committee member, Bill Dean

Mr. Contractor Award – Tyler Seals

Illinois LICA is proud to recognize Tyler Seals with Kieffer Bros. Construction Co. as our 2025 Mr. Contractor. Tyler continues to strengthen his company’s long-standing reputation through hands-on leadership, deep industry involvement, and exceptional community service.

Since taking over operations in 2021, Tyler has led the farm drainage division of his family’s company which was founded in 1947 and is now a full-scale construction firm employing more than 50 people. He manages and maintains an extensive fleet of drainage and construction equipment while overseeing projects that span farm drainage, earthwork, concrete construction, municipal infrastructure, water systems, and more.

Tyler’s impact extends far beyond the jobsite. He works closely with his local SWCD and NRCS offices on drainage programs and water management system design, helping landowners access the most beneficial conservation resources. His community involvement is equally impressive supporting the Chamber of Commerce, local festivals, fundraisers, youth outdoor education, FFA, 4-H, and multiple Farm Bureau programs. His service has earned him repeated recognition in local and statewide publications.

Since becoming an official Illinois LICA member in 2022, Tyler has been one of the association's most active leaders. He attends nearly every meeting, workshop, and event; volunteers at the Farm Progress Show; and serves on multiple committees, including Convention, Executive, Legislative, and Nomination. He also chairs both the Budget and Safety Committees and currently serves as Illinois LICA's Vice President, demonstrating a level of commitment and leadership that continues to elevate our association.



LaVerne Weber and his wife Susan

Leadership Award – LaVerne Weber

Illinois LICA is proud to present the 2025 Leadership Award to LaVerne Weber with Grade Solutions LLC, a member whose dedication, professionalism, and commitment to advancing the industry exemplify the very definition of leadership.

Nominees for this award are evaluated on their loyalty to the Association, their willingness to share knowledge, and their representation of the construction industry with integrity. LaVerne embodies each of these qualities and has demonstrated exceptional leadership throughout his three years of membership.

He has served Illinois LICA through key roles including the Budget and Executive Committees, the Board of Directors, and as First Vice President, while contributing meaningfully to numerous other committee efforts. His leadership has already been recognized with the 2023 Innovator Award and the 2024 Shiny Shovel Award.

Beyond Illinois LICA, LaVerne is a respected leader in the drainage industry. He actively participates in local, national, and international outreach focused on conservation drainage and subsurface irrigation. His expertise is shared widely through field days, panels, presentations, podcasts, webinars, and published articles, helping connect contractors, landowners, and conservation partners across the industry by leaving a lasting impact on how conservation drainage is understood and practiced.



Joe Streitmatter and his wife Jackie

Shiny Shovel Award – Joe Streitmatter

Illinois LICA is proud to recognize Joe Streitmatter, Streitmatter Land Improvement, with the 2025 Shiny Shovel Award. This award honors members and partners who consistently support the Association throughout the year financially, physically, and through ongoing promotion of ILICA's mission. These are the individuals whose "shovels never have time to rust," because they are always engaged, always contributing, and always showing up.

In 2025, Illinois LICA hosted an exceptionally active slate of events, including business meetings, golf outings, trap shoots, workshops, webinars, field demonstrations, partner meetings, and our annual meeting. Providing support across so many activities is a remarkable commitment for any volunteer, and Joe has done exactly that.

Joe has devoted his time, resources, and hands-on help to numerous ILICA events and initiatives this year, demonstrating unwavering dedication to the Association and its members. His steady presence and

willingness to contribute wherever needed make him an invaluable part of our organization and the ideal embodiment of what the Shiny Shovel Award represents.



Courson & Associates: Zoey Yang, Maddison Lynn, Kaylee Collinson, Dustin Courson, Kelly Hix, Ziyang Li

Associate of the Year – Courson & Associates

Illinois LICA has long been strengthened by members whose dedication, loyalty, and generosity extend far beyond their professional lives. This spirit of service and fellowship, more like a family than an association, continues to define who we are today and is reflected in the Associate of the Year Award, which honors those who support ILICA's mission, participate actively in chapter and area events, and contribute meaningfully to membership development.

This year's recipient has been a steadfast supporter of Illinois LICA for more than two decades. Their relationship with the Association began during a challenging chapter in our history, when they immediately stepped forward, working with the Springfield police department and state's attorney to advocate for ILICA when it mattered most. From that moment on, Courson & Associates have stood firmly beside us.

Their team continues to guide and educate our members with unmatched industry expertise, helping keep contractors compliant, informed, and profitable. Beyond their professional support, they consistently sponsor, participate in, and uplift ILICA events and activities year after year.

Always ready to answer the call and share their knowledge and representing the commitment and partnership that make our Association strong, Illinois LICA is proud to recognize Courson & Associates as the 2025 Associate of the Year.

Most Active New Member – Jody Kabat

The Most Active New Member Award recognizes new Illinois LICA members who immediately immerse themselves in the life of the Association contributing their time, energy, and expertise during their very first year of membership. Recipients must demonstrate consistent engagement and meaningful support for ILICA events, initiatives, and activities throughout the award year.

This year's honoree did exactly that. Jody Kabat with Burnin' Daylight Outdoors embraced Illinois LICA from the moment he joined in 2025, attending convention, participating in both in-person and virtual workshops, and volunteering at the ILICA booth during the Farm Progress Show, all within his first 12 months. He also jumped in quickly with the Show Committee, offering insight and assistance on our Rend Lake RCPP projects in his area.

With a strong background in agriculture, engineering, conservation, and land improvement contracting, Jody has already shown that he fits seamlessly into the ILICA community. His enthusiasm, professionalism, and willingness to contribute make him an exciting new member of the Association, and we look forward to watching his involvement grow alongside the expansion of his company.

As we celebrate this year's award recipients, we extend our sincere gratitude to all members, partners, and supporters who continue to invest in Illinois LICA's mission. Your leadership, involvement, and passion

ensure that our Association remains strong, forward-thinking, and deeply connected to the contractors and communities we serve. Together, we honor the legacy of those who built Illinois LICA and look ahead with confidence to the continued growth and success of our industry.