Gerald Roethel Named 2025 WiRSA Rural School Board Member of the Year

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The Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WiRSA) has named **Gerald (Gerry) Roethel**, longtime Westby Area School District board member and past president, as the **2025 Rural School Board Member of the Year**.

Roethel has served on the Westby school board for the past **11 years**, providing steady leadership during some of the most challenging and transformative times in the district's history. As Board President, he worked with district leaders and the community to guide Westby through the **2018 floods**, the **COVID-19 pandemic**, and the passage of **multiple operating and capital referenda** that have ensured the district's financial stability and long-term success.

A career educator, Roethel began as a **math teacher at Westby Area High School** before serving as a **Director with Coulee Region United Educators**, where he supported more than 20 rural school districts in Southwestern Wisconsin. Known for his fairness, professionalism, and ability to bring people together, he worked tirelessly to help teachers, administrators, and boards navigate difficult situations with respect and balance.

Since returning to Westby as a school board member, Roethel has been a driving force in strengthening the district. He has championed innovative opportunities for students, including the development of a **Health Science Academy in partnership with Vernon Memorial Hospital** and a **Trades Academy** to expand career pathways for young people. His efforts reflect his lifelong belief that rural schools can provide students with outstanding opportunities while maintaining their strong community values.

"Gerry's calm leadership, deep understanding of education, and unwavering commitment to students and staff have been invaluable to our district," said **Steve Michaels, Superintendent of Westby Area School District**, who nominated Roethel for the honor. "His impact has been felt not only in Westby, but throughout the Coulee Region and across Wisconsin."

In addition to his work in Westby, Roethel serves on the **CESA Board of Control** and the **WiRSA Board of Directors**, ensuring that rural schools across Wisconsin have a strong voice in state-level discussions. Beyond education, he and his wife, Corky, have also been active members of the community, operating a pheasant farm that reflects the same hard work and dedication Roethel has brought to every aspect of his life.

The Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance is proud to recognize Gerald Roethel for his decades of service and leadership. His contributions to students, educators, and the community exemplify the very best of rural education.

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