

## 2021 Governor's Awards Ceremony

On October 5<sup>th</sup>, the 2021 Governor's Awards Ceremony was held at the Capitol Rotunda in Pierre. Governor Kristi Noem recognized South Dakota businesses, individuals with disabilities, and other South Dakotans for their contributions toward the employment of people with disabilities.



**Awards were presented to the following recipients:**



**Mark T. Sternhagen of Brookings** is an exceptional individual: a motivated self-starter, leader, and a campaigner for civil rights. Despite physical limitations caused by polio, Mark has proven his devotion to the cause of people with disabilities through his activism and guidance on many boards and organizations. He has built and championed a life as an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. Mark received the **Outstanding Individual with a Disability Award**.

**Eric Larson of Menno** is self-employed and operates an insurance business, entitled Larson Insurance. His business is thriving and in 2019, he purchased a new building and is putting profits back into his business to ensure long-term success. Despite challenges, Eric has shown exceptional perseverance and a commitment to independence and self-sufficiency. For these achievements, Eric was awarded the **Outstanding Employee with a Disability**.



**TMA of Mitchell** is an automotive business that goes above and beyond for showing kindness, compassion toward others, and setting a great example of how others should be treated. TMA looks for demonstrated skills and strengths in their employees and puts them in a position to succeed. TMA ensures that their employees with disabilities are treated the same as anyone else. TMA received the **Outstanding Private Employer (Small Employer)**.

**MasterBrand Cabinets/StarMark Cabinetry of Sioux Falls** was this year's recipient of the **Outstanding Private Employer (Large Employer)**. StarMark has a truly inclusive workplace and culture. They actively recruit employees with disabilities, provide disability awareness training to all employees, and provide advancement opportunities for employees with disabilities. MasterBrand Cabinets/StarMark Cabinetry partners with vocational rehabilitation and other agencies to find employees that have helped to make the company successful.



**Brown County Register of Deeds of Aberdeen** received the **Outstanding Employer Award (Other category)**. Together as a department, and with the support and direction of Roberta Nichols who is the elected Brown County Register of Deeds, all employees treat one another as a team. Roberta strongly promotes diversity and inclusion within the department by encouraging and recognizing the attributes of each employee. The Brown County Register of Deeds department received this award because they recognize the benefits that employees with disabilities bring to their workforce.





**Cindy Bierman of Mitchell** is employed as a special education teacher with the Mitchell School District. She provides the foundation for her students to succeed after high school, and has the ability to communicate, inspire, and motivate students. Her skills, knowledge, and enthusiasm make the difference when working with her students. Cindy **was the recipient of the Outstanding Transition Services Award.**



**Vicki Nelson of Sioux Falls** has worked for the SD Division of Rehabilitation Services for over 25 years. She works tirelessly to ensure that individuals who are receiving vocational rehabilitation services are given the best opportunity to find employment that they love and are happy with. Vicki inspires others in her office and encourages top-notch customer service. For her lifelong passion of assisting people with disabilities to reach their goals, Vicki received the **Distinguished Service Award.**