



Inspiring tomorrow's local leaders

MTA awards annual Robinson Scholarship

Growing up, Tyler Watt saw first-hand the services offered by township government.

The third-year University of Michigan student attended Swan Valley schools in **Thomas Township** (Saginaw Co.) throughout his middle and high school career, and also worked at a small business in the township managed by his father.

"I was familiar with some of the work done by the township, as well as some of the officials," explained Watt, who is majoring in political science, with a focus on American political systems and history. "I have been in the area for years."

These experiences with local government led Watt to pursue an internship with the township—and to look toward a future career in local or state politics. Watt is the 2020 recipient of MTA's Robert R. Robinson Memorial Scholarship, which is awarded annually to a junior, senior or graduate student in a Michigan college or university seeking a career in local government.

First-hand experience to community success

During his summer internship with Thomas Township—in 2018 and 2019—Watt received up-close and hands-on experiences that have shaped his future aspirations. He worked closely with Township Manager **Russ Taylor** in negotiating a contract with a local utilities provider, explored both costs and benefits of the township's community Roethke Pool, and pursued a historic designation for the township's Owen Cemetery. He also assisted Deputy Clerk **Darci Seamon** with preparations for the 2018 primary election.

His time with the township "attests to my commitment to local government as a potential career path," Watt said.

"Students should definitely consider careers in local government, for several reasons," he continued. "They are versatile, encompassing everywhere from parks management to public works management. There is room for advancement and professional growth, and the success of the community is

closely tied to the work done by its officials, both elected and hired. Local governments are an asset to the improvement of their communities at a level greater than any state- or federal-level involvement could ever approach.”

Watt called his work with the township “incredibly rewarding,” noting that he will carry the lessons learned in his future career. “Though my career aspirations are not concrete, I want to one day work in politics, likely at a local or state level—in either elected or appointed/hired positions,” he said. “My greatest goals as a future public servant are to maximize transparency and minimize fiscal waste within the government, no matter the level.”

A key takeaway from Watt’s local government ties is a township adage to which MTA also subscribes: Neighbors serving neighbors. “I have a particular attachment to the possibility of working on local government, as I have witnessed firsthand how it is best-suited to help communities at times of hardship, much like how Thomas Township responded to the May 2020 floods,” he said. “Though state and federal levels of government have resources to also respond to such events, it is the lowest level of government, where those you serve are also your friends and neighbors, that bears the most meaningful impact on a community in need.”

A dedication to service and community

In addition to being a 4.0 grade point average student, with expectations to graduate in May 2022, Watt has an extensive history of volunteering and service. He has volunteered at the Zauel Library, part of the Public Libraries of Saginaw, for Delta College, Swan Valley Athletic Department and the Swan Valley High School Technological Education Department. He was also a delegate to the county convention for **Saginaw Charter Township** (Saginaw Co.) Precinct 3.

Through the local Young Americans for Freedom organization, Watt took part in community service activities including placing more than 2,000 flags in campus commons in memory of 9/11 victims. He currently serves as counsel to the student government of the U-M College of Literature, Science and the Arts, and is a resident advisor and residential staff coordinator for his U-M dormitory.

His scholarship essay—a requirement for applicants, to discuss an issue of importance to local government—addressed licensing of marijuana businesses in the state, including the costs and benefits of this emerging issue. While there can be fiscal benefits, in terms of tax revenue and business growth, Watt also noted the effects of marijuana impairment, for example driving while impaired, and potential medical impacts, as well as community preferences.

“Often, there is not an easy choice to be made between these two competing mindsets,” he wrote. “It is for this reason that the Hamlet-esque question of ‘to legalize, or not to legalize’ weighs heavily on the minds of many municipal administrators in the Great Lakes State as a clear dilemma.”

With his local government experience and aspirations, along with a commitment to public service and volunteerism, Watt embodies the qualifications of the Robert R. Robinson Memorial Scholarship, and offers inspiration for fellow students seeking to serve as future local leaders.

Support Michigan’s future leaders

MTA’s second executive director, Robert R. Robinson was dedicated to townships and to furthering the form of government closest to the people. MTA established a memorial scholarship in Robinson’s honor after he passed away in 1987.

Robinson dedicated much of his life to township government. In addition to his eight years as MTA executive director, he served for six years as MTA’s legislative director, and was a cofounder and board member of the National Association of Towns and Townships, including two years as president. He spent a decade as **Meridian Charter Township** (Ingham Co.) supervisor before joining MTA in 1969. Awarding this endowment each year in his name helps to ensure that Michigan’s future local leaders continue to value and protect township government and the Michigan residents it serves.

Township officials and MTA county chapters can help ensure that we are able to continue supporting the educational pursuits of tomorrow’s township leaders by making a donation to support the scholarship fund. “The scholarship fund is critical both to students in pursuit of their local government careers, and to all public officials as we work to encourage today’s students to pursue a future in public service,” said Robinson Scholarship Committee Chair **Harold Koviak**, MTA District 4 director and **Burt Township** (Cheboygan Co.) supervisor.

Contributions are tax deductible. Checks payable to the Robert R. Robinson Memorial Scholarship Fund can be sent to MTA, PO Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078. Learn more about the scholarship on at www.michigantownships.org/scholarship.asp, or call (517) 321-6467 with questions.



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