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Odden '71 Earns Distinguished Alumni Award

An educator, community leader, and philanthropist, Odden has a long history of service to his alma mater and to greater Minnesota.

James "Jim" Odden '71 is this year's University of Minnesota Morris Distinguished Alumni Award winner. An educator, community leader, and philanthropist, Odden has a long history of service to his alma mater and to greater Minnesota.

"James Odden epitomizes the concept of a distinguished University of Minnesota Morris alumnus," says nominator Tom Mahoney '70. "Jim's service to UMN Morris, his profession, and his communities personifies the liberal arts ideal."

Education and Career

Odden graduated from UMN Morris with distinction in 1971, with a major in history and a minor in philosophy. He returned to study elementary education and went on to earn his MA in learning and human development technology from the University of St. Thomas in 1989.

Odden has enjoyed a full career as a classroom teacher and teacher educator. He co-developed the Miliona Science Magnet School, an "Outstanding Education Program by the Minnesota Rural Education Association." Odden also served on the education faculty at UMN Morris from 1991–92 and as an adjunct instructor from 1992–2000.

Odden was named Minnesota Classroom Teacher of the Year by the Minnesota Association of Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities in 1988, Minnesota State Conservation Teacher of the Year by the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in 1989, and Teacher of the Year by the Alexandria Education Association in 2000. He is a past president of the Alexandria Education Association (AEA), he served on the governing board for the Western South Minnesota Education Association (MEA) as chair of the Teachers' Rights Council. Odden also served on the state Teachers' Rights Council and on the advisory board for the Minnesota Center for School Change to evaluate proposals and select grant recipients to improve rural Minnesota schools.

Giving Back

Odden is equally known for his generosity and leadership. After retiring in 2007, Odden has continued to volunteer at the Douglas County Library, and at Garfield Elementary School. He's been a member of the Douglas County Library Board, member of the Alexandria Tree Board, and volunteer for the Minnesota Master Naturalist Volunteer Organization. He's also served the Minnesota Land Trust, Carlos State Park, Community Collaborative for Rain, Hail and Snow, and National Weather Service.

Odden is past president of the [UMN Morris Alumni Association Board of Directors](#). He's a member of the [UMN President's Club](#) and the lead donor for the Student Assistance Grant for Emergencies Fund (SAGE). Odden also worked with campus staff to coordinate efforts of Phi Mu Delta brothers to fund two named scholarships for UMN Morris students.

"Truly, Jim Odden has brought credit to himself, to UMN Morris, and to the profession and the communities that he has served," says Professor of History Roland Guyotte.

About the Distinguished Alumni Award

The Distinguished Alumni Award honors alumni who make noteworthy contributions in their professional lives, in public service, or in service to the University of Minnesota. Learn more at alumni.morris.umn.edu.