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STEM Forward to Honor STEM Outreach and Engineering Excellence at the 71st Annual Celebration of STEM Event

MILWAUKEE—[STEM Forward](http://www.stemforward.org) is pleased to recognize Milwaukee Tool as the 2024 *Spirit of STEM* recipient, **Dr. Junjie Niu** as the 2023 *Engineer of the Year*, and Dr. RJ Nowling as the 2023 *Young Engineer of the Year*. The honorees will be celebrated at the [71st Annual Celebration of STEM](#) on Tuesday, February 13, 2024, from 5 PM to 8 PM at the Brookfield Conference Center.

This year's keynote speaker is Dale Kooyenga, President of the [Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce](#). Dale will share his thoughts on growing capital investment, jobs, and improving the quality of life in greater Milwaukee. As he commented recently, *“I’m humbled by the task at hand - excited to leverage the successes we’ve seen in this community in recent years and confident in facing the challenges we’ll be addressing together. Since 1861, MMAC has had an immense impact on southeastern Wisconsin. I’m excited to carry on that legacy and serve the best interests of our membership and the community.”* Join us to hear Dale’s perspective during the Celebration of STEM keynote presentation.

Dr. Junjie Niu is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Industrial & Manufacturing Engineering Department at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UWM). Dr. Niu is also an Affiliate Associate Professor of the School of Freshwater Sciences at UWM and on the Editorial Board of the Journal of Physics: Materials (IOP Publishing) and Guest Editor of the Journal of Physics: Energy. He has received numerous awards and grants. Dr. Niu’s interdisciplinary research includes understanding fundamental science in physics/chemistry, and engineering materials in applications of energy storage with next-generation lithium-ion and beyond batteries, and water treatments particularly with PFAS remediation and the corresponding chemo-mechanics. Dr. Niu is devoted to helping STEM students meet the ever-increasing educational demand in the water-energy nexus for their future careers.

Dr. RJ Nowling is an Associate Professor of Computer Science and coordinator for the Graduate Certificate in Applied ML at the Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE). He holds a Ph.D. in Computer Science and Engineering from the University of Notre Dame with a focus on mathematical models and numerical algorithms for physics-based simulation of molecules and applications of statistical analyses to understanding the genomes of mosquitoes. For four years, Dr Nowling was a data science engineer in industry where he learned to build and operate machine learning-powered services using cloud infrastructure. Dr. Nowling joined MSOE in the Fall of 2018 where he develops and teaches courses in data science, machine learning, data structures, algorithms, and data-intensive systems. Dr Nowling draws on his combined industry and academic experience to ensure that courses prepare students for real-world applications. Dr. Nowling collaborates with MSOE students and multiple external research groups to improve the understanding of biology systems through the application of machine learning and data science to genomic data.

Dr. Niu and Dr. Nowling were selected from a pool of highly qualified nominees committed to advancing the engineering profession and inspiring others in southeastern Wisconsin. An independent judging panel

completed the evaluation and selection of the nominees. STEM Forward's *Engineer of the Year* has been a tradition since 1953. The award is given to a remarkable person in the Milwaukee 7 County Community who has made an extraordinary contribution to the engineering profession. The *Young Engineer of the Year* recognizes an exemplary engineer under forty.

[Milwaukee Tool](#) is receiving the 2024 *Spirit of STEM Award* for its outstanding commitment to STEM outreach and improving the STEM competency of K-12 students. When we asked Austin Equitz, Senior Firmware Test Engineer, he answered, “*Milwaukee Tool is truly honored to accept the Spirit of STEM award. This recognition reflects our commitment to fostering innovation, supporting education, and empowering future generations in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. We are dedicated to advancing STEM initiatives and contributing to a brighter, more technologically proficient future.*”

The *Spirit of STEM Award* was established in 2013 to honor organizations that are committed to advancing STEM education and building talent in southeastern Wisconsin. Their efforts significantly impact STEM education and talent. Past recipients include Direct Supply, GE Healthcare, Komatsu, Northwestern Mutual, Rockwell Automation, We Energies, American Family Insurance, and Harley Davidson.

Individual tickets and group sponsorships are now available for this premier event celebrating local STEM accomplishments. To learn more, visit [Eventbrite](#) or our [website](#).

About STEM Forward

STEM Forward is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and metro Milwaukee's leading STEM education and outreach provider. STEM Forward's programs, events, and activities inspire local youth to pursue STEM careers and provide a talent pipeline to businesses in Wisconsin.

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