



Nominations are Open for the 51st Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest BMO Financial Group Women of the Year Awards

- **New Title Sponsor Announced**
- **Nomination Deadline is March 20th**

January 26, 2026 – KITCHENER, ON – [Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest](#) (KWO) is thrilled to announce a new title sponsor and that nominations are now open for the 51st anniversary of the [BMO Financial Group Women of the Year](#) awards. The annual celebration will take place on the evening of Thursday, May 21st, 2026.

“Since 1975, K-W Oktoberfest has proudly shone a spotlight on the incredible women who strengthen our community,” shares Tracy Van Kalsbeek, Executive Director. “This event continues to advance women’s accomplishments, champion equality and inspire the next generation of leaders. We are also delighted to announce BMO Financial Group as our new title sponsor.”

“BMO is proud to partner with K-W Oktoberfest’s Women of the Year Awards as the 2026 Title Sponsor,” says Jacqueline Hewson, Vice President and Market Leader for BMO Private Wealth & BMO Nesbitt Burns Inc. “BMO is honored to help recognize and elevate the remarkable women who inspire progress across our community.”

Last year Women of the Year paid tribute to a remarkable 140 nominees, including the first-ever contenders in the inaugural Educator and Rising Star categories.

Community members are encouraged to nominate deserving women in any of the 12 Women of the Year categories. Nominees must reside, work, volunteer, or study within Waterloo Region. They can be individuals who are involved in the community, inspire others, motivate and/or embrace change. Nominees can also be those who demonstrate initiative, recognize and confirm success in others, or touch people’s lives in quiet and compassionate ways. **The nomination deadline is 4:00 p.m. on March 20th, 2026 or (new) until the cap of 140 nominations is reached, whichever comes first.**

K-W Oktoberfest BMO Financial Group Women of the Year is for all women. As in the past, nominations and nominees are inclusive of all women, non-binary, transgender, two-spirited, women of all classes, races, sexualities, abilities and identities.

[2026 Award Categories:](#)

Arts & Culture recognizes women for enriching the culture of our community through creation or promotion of the arts on a volunteer or professional basis.

Community Service recognizes women for generously volunteering time to programs and services that make our community a better place.

Educator recognizes women for empowering individuals and strengthening our community through outstanding contributions to education and lifelong learning.

Entrepreneur (40+ Years Old) recognizes women for initiating and/or administering an enterprise or business.

Group Achievement recognizes achievements by a group of women that impact and/or improve our community or society.

Health & Wellness recognizes women for helping others achieve and promote well-being in their career or through community involvement.

Lifetime Achievement recognizes women who, for over 35 years, have been role models, mentors and/or advocates for positive social change.

Professional (40+ Years Old) recognizes women for dedicating themselves to the pursuit of excellence in their chosen careers.

Skilled Trades recognizes women for exceptional contributions to the advancement and empowerment of women in the trades sector.

Science, Technology, Engineering & Math recognizes women for outstanding advancement to the field of STEM.

Vanguard (Under 40 Years Old – previously called Rising Star) recognizes women for demonstrating exceptional leadership potential and innovation while achieving significant professional and entrepreneurial accomplishments early in their career.

Young Adult (14 to 23) recognizes women for leading by example and being a role model to their peers.

Everything regarding the Women of the Year nomination process, including the [form](#), can be found [HERE](#).

The Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest BMO Financial Group Women of the Year Awards are proudly supported by [Harp & Fin](#) and [Sherwood Events](#). To become a sponsor or to join the volunteer committee, visit womenoftheyear.ca/get-involved/.

Photo enclosed of award recipients at the 2025 Women of the Year Awards.

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About [Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest](#)

The first Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest was celebrated in 1969 at Concordia Club in Kitchener, organized by a group of dedicated founders. The keg was tapped and history was made. Since then, Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest has developed its own traditions, becoming one of the largest Bavarian Festivals outside of Germany. Tens of thousands of visitors celebrate annually in our Festhallen, at local restaurants and by attending one of our many family and cultural events. More than just biergartens, Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest is committed to supporting the cultural, economic and social vitality of Waterloo Region, bringing millions of dollars in economic benefit to the Region each year. *Oktoberfest Cares* provides funding for charitable partners and supports Festival initiatives that enrich our community such as the Onkel Hans Food Drive and keep admission costs low or free for favourites including the Women of the Year celebration and family-friendly events like KIDtoberfest, Thanksgiving Day Parade and the Willkommen Platz. For more information visit www.oktoberfest.ca.

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