

Dear JCI USA Awards Committee and National President Bethanie Miller,

Please consider this letter of recommendation to award Broderick "Brody" Heflin for the Rob Ray Memorial Award for Special Partner.

Brody and I began dating on May 25th, 2025. This was right at the beginning of JCI Michigan's "busy season". Brody, who had never heard of JCI/Jaycees prior to our meeting, jumped in headfirst.

On June 7th he accompanied me volunteering at Mt Pleasant Jaycees' Beer Fest. That night we stayed at a past MI state president's house, then went to join the Redford Jaycees and other District C chapters in Motor City Pride Parade the following day. Which also was Brody's (a native Michigander) first time in Detroit. The next weekend was spent manning a tent at Bridgefest for the Allegan Jaycees on Saturday. The following weekend involved visiting the Wyandotte Jaycees' tent at Downriver Pride on Saturday, and attending a district social hosted by JCI Lansing on Sunday. He officially joined the Kalamazoo chapter, which was closest to his home, on June 16th, 2025, after attending a GMM. Also in the month of June, I formally announced my campaign for National Vice President, which would commit me to another year of intense JCI-focused work. Brody was fully in support of me moving up into a national role.

Starting a new relationship can be tough, especially when it comes to meeting friends and family. Not only has Brody met a large amount of my extended family (which is huge), but he also has met over 150 Jaycees in a short time. He also has had to quickly learn the JCI acronyms, programs, traditions, and other intricacies to follow along.

At nearly 7 months into our relationship, Brody has attended about 30 JCI events. The majority of those have been local chapter projects, but he also has attended state events (mid-year board and family social, JCI Michigan camping weekend, Fall Conference, Local Organization Training School, district socials and the board holiday party). He also attended the Mid-America Institute Annual Workshop in Ohio, and the JCI Michigan visit to JCI Wisconsin.

Brody is a rather introverted person, and struggles with anxiety, particularly with large groups of people. Diving headfirst into Jaycees has been very daunting for him mentally. He also has had to make sacrifices because of my involvement with the Jaycees. When Brody's brother got married, I had prior commitments to hosting an out-of-state Jaycee and could not attend the wedding. It was difficult for Brody, as he wanted me to meet his family at the wedding. While at a district social, Brody had a headache and I had agreed to keep the visit short. A new member arrived late, and was asking me for historical context and advice as he had pushed for his chapter to not give up World Expo of Beer, Michigan's largest Jaycee project and an event that provides significant impact to the local community. Brody was upset that I got sidetracked and they left later than planned, but understood the importance of helping that member.

Having to work weekend plans around the JCI is something that does wear on him, but he also has gotten engaged in JCI on his own. Prior to meeting me and becoming familiar with JCI, he was already spending a lot of time volunteering at a food pantry and working on professional development as he has been exploring a career change. Joining the Jaycees was an easy decision, as his personal values already aligned, and he has since experienced that "conference high" after Local Organization Training School, where he was ready to take on the world through his chapter. Because of this, he understands the significance of my role and the mission of the organization, and is supportive of my dedication and duty to JCI, even when it means long hours or JCI focused plans.

He has stepped up in his own right as a member, challenging himself to speak publicly at the Mid-America Workshop and at LOTS. He actively participated in his chapter's biggest project, Ghosts of Kalamazoo and began to reach out to prospective members. He was elected to serve as the 2026 JCI Kalamazoo Treasurer. But mainly, his experience in the Jaycees has been supporting me as I serve JCI Michigan and JCI USA, through chapter visits and taking on a lot of the work at home so I can better focus on the organization.

He has been picking up a great deal of chores around the house to allow me to have more time for Jaycees. Most days, Brody is the one responsible for taking care of my 70 chinchillas and making dinner, as I am busy with meetings and other Jaycee business. He stayed at my house while I was away at National Convention and State President's Retreat to take care of the chinchillas, 2 dogs, and household chores. This has been especially crucial as my father, who lives in the same house, also began a relationship this year and spends his weekends across the state. Without Brody's help, I would have had a lot more on my plate with managing the chinchilla farm and arranging for pet sitters.

More importantly, Brody has been a source of emotional support and encouragement throughout the year. He has kept things light and humorous when things got stressful. He has offered words of encouragement when I felt like I was failing. Our relationship has also helped remind me that there is more to life than Jaycees, and the few weekends we had free from Jaycee commitments we have spent going on dates and connecting with friends. This has been especially important, because I have a tendency to be a workaholic and bad at setting boundaries and thus am more prone to experiencing burnout. I haven't felt burnt out nearly as much this year, and Brody is most definitely to thank for that.

This year would have looked very different if Brody hadn't come into my life. I believe for the most part the successes I've had in my presidency would have still happened, but many of the smaller details that went into planning events or follow ups with individuals would've been missed. I definitely would've been in a lot worse shape mental health wise, had it not been for Brody.

Thank you for your consideration of Broderick "Brody" Heflin for the Rob Ray Memorial Award for Special Partner.

Sincerely,  
Kayleigh Gratz  
101st President of JCI Michigan  
2026 JCI USA National Vice President