

How Baraboo Honors its Good Citizens

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

One of the glories of a small city is that you sometimes get to be a big fish in a small pond. We don't mean this in a derogatory way, but rather that there is a meaningful custom not generally found in the smallest towns, but more common in growing cities like Baraboo. In large cities it is usually sponsored by a radio station or similar commercial venture, for profit.

The custom, of course, is an annual recognition of the Person of the Year, formerly known as the Man of the Year. Sometimes it is called the Distinguished Service Award. It begins when some group or organization decides to honor someone for their extra public service. In Baraboo the custom has lasted nearly half a century.

For the past 25 years, the ceremony has been held annually by the Kiwanis Club, and originated in the recognition of public service by one of its own members, Dr. Al Dippel. Indeed it has gone by the Dippel name ever since about 1985.

Kiwanis cannot claim to have started the practice, however, for we have found records showing that the Jaycees began the custom under another name as early as 1962. If this is true, the award in one form or another is in its 49th year.

At the time of this writing, the nominee for this year has yet to be announced, but one can be sure that considerable work and research by a special Kiwanis Committee went into the selection. A dinner or reception is customarily held, open to all, and should be announced shortly.

The first Known Award

Somewhere there probably exists an old program or news item announcing the first award that we know of, given in 1962 by the Jaycees to Wilbur Deppe. It was called the Distinguished Service Award in those days.

Deppe was well chosen, especially by those who knew of multiple acts of public service which never received publicity, though his aid in getting the Circus Museum on its feet was already widely known. A complex personality, we can visualize Wilbur chewing vigorously on an already decimated cigar and saying "why the h*** would you want to do that?" (Or worse) when told of his selection.

Unfortunately we don't know a great deal about the early awards. Were they dinners, where were they held, who spoke, etc.? We do, however, have the list of honored public service recipients for the first 21 years, and it reads like a Who's Who of Baraboo.

Consider the first ten: Following Deppe, the yearly honoree lists reads as follows: Aubrey Barnhart, Ted Mandt, George Weber, Judge Bob Gollmar, Ray Otis, Judge Jim Karch, Bill Kieffer Sr., Rev. Louia Gransee, and John Lange.

The next nine included John Langer, Dr. Pearson, Ken Nelson, Clark Wilkinson, Allen Paschen, Gordon Cline, George Rambo, Art Bailey, and Chet Corson. There was apparently no nominee in 1981, a time when many of the vigorous and enthusiastic post-war young Jaycee men had "aged" to the point where they were called "Exhausted Roosters". They had to depart from the Jaycees at age 35 due to its by-laws.

We do show an honoree for 1982, in fact double honorees, namely Gary and Shirley Smith. 1984 found Karl Netzband's name penciled in on my list, the source of which is unknown. That is the end of the list I have, and the mimeographed program lists the award as both "Distinguished Service Award" and "Boss's Night", the latter somewhat of a departure from the original intent

Kiwanis takes up the Award

It was at this time that the Kiwanis Club took up the banner, perhaps because many of the "Roosters" had graduated into Kiwanis from the somewhat weakened Jaycees, as well as the recognition that it was a great idea that should be perpetuated.

Also, the last of the 1922 Kiwanis' founding members, Dr. Al Dippel, had passed away and it was felt some recognition of his some 60 years as a Kiwanian should be made. Al had set an example of public service through Kiwanis activities as well as in other public activities.

There is not room to dwell at length on the some 25 nominees that have been honored by Kiwanis, again usually with a dinner or reception and speakers, sometimes in the form of a roast. They will simply be listed at the end of this article,

It might be noted, however, that only two persons have been awarded both the Distinguished Service Award and the Kiwanis Al. Dippel award. One is Chester Corson. New to the community not long before the 1980 award, Corson was selected only seven years later by the Kiwanis Club as the 1997 recipient. Allen Paschen is also a double winner, having received both awards.

Also note the only Father and Son winners, Wilbur and David Deppe. And a big question--has Dr. Al Dippel ever been awarded the award, even post-humously? Apparently not, but he is always eulogized at the annual recognition day in his honor.

The Awards since 1985

1986, Millie Zantow
 1987, Chet Corson
 1988, Roger Stieve
 1989, Helen Ziegler
 1990, Harry Saloutos
 1991, Robert Dewel
 1992, Pat LaGrasssa
 1993, David Deppe
 1994, Jerry Stich
 1995, Pat Kaune
 1996, Chappie Fox
 1997, Keith Anderson
 1998, Allen Paschen
 1999, Al Zipsie
 2000, Al and Nita Dippel
 2001, Jay Henke
 2002, Mary Hein
 2003, Mary Bowers
 2004, Walt Smith
 2005, Joan Fordham

2006, Herb Messer
2007, Jim Kieffer
2008, Pete Premo
2009, Forrest Hartman

The winner for 2010

The selection of a yearly winner is a difficult task, as I believe the Committee would acknowledge. Many good people are passed over every year. Also, some prefer to hide their community service "under a barrel".

Every recipient, it seems, questions the validity of their selection, expresses humility, and recognizes that others are just as deserving. The 2010 winner is yet to be announced as we write.

Since the award was originally given shortly after a new year Baraboo began, the date for the recognition is one year behind the actual recognition date. This year's winner, therefore, will be listed as the 2010 honoree. You can be sure he/she will have a full resume of public service.

ADDENDA: It is now announced that DOUG HILL is the latest honoree. We know that Doug's litany of accomplishments will well qualify him for the honor. More information will be forthcoming.