

"Federation Corner" column
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The 2013 Civic Federation Awards winners

by Jim Humphrey
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On Friday evening, May 3, the Montgomery County Civic Federation will hold its Annual Awards Banquet. The following are summaries of the accomplishments of the three 2013 award recipients.

This year the **Sentinel Award**, which honors significant contribution to good government at the local level, will be given to the Montgomery County Taxpayers League (MCTL). The MCTL was established years ago as a nonpartisan, nonprofit and non-stock Maryland corporation. Its objective, as stated in its bylaws, is "to arouse, stimulate and mobilize public interest and support for appropriate actions to achieve greater efficiency and economy in the government of Montgomery County and tax equity for Montgomery County taxpayers and communities. The League will direct its actions to County and State government matters which are of county-wide significance and likely to impact a significant segment of county." In short, the Taxpayers League educates and advocates for the taxpayers of the county. The League does this by testifying before the County Council, and by informing the public through its monthly meetings with speakers drawn from county leadership, through commentaries in local newspapers, and with television appearances.

For many years Marvin Weinman served as representative from the MCTL to the Civic Federation. He reported on the League's activities and findings, and worked to keep the Civic Federation more informed and active on matters of governmental fiscal efficiency. In fact, Marvin predicted the county's fiscal crisis years before it was acknowledged by the political leaders of the county. The Taxpayers League continues to be strengthened by the participation of multiple Civic Federation members. The MCCF is pleased to present the 2013 Sentinel Award to the Montgomery County Taxpayers League in recognition of its efforts to improve local government.

The Civic Federation finds it exquisitely appropriate to present Steve Kanstoroom with the **Wayne Goldstein Award**, recognizing outstanding service to the people of Montgomery County, since the two worked closely together for the four years preceding Wayne's passing in 2009. Steve has focused his activist efforts on a host of issue areas. Maryland Governor Donald Shaffer recognized him for his years of work on legislation benefiting victims of domestic violence. He has worked with The Humane Society of the United States on legislation and regulations to protect animals in Maryland and across the U.S. And in 2005, after documenting a pattern of fraudulent insurance claims practices by private insurers who participate in the National Flood Insurance Program, Steve provided testimony at Congressional hearings that resulted in passage of the Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2006 and the mandated review of all Hurricane Isabel flood claims, leading to tens of millions of additional dollars being paid by insurance carriers to storm victims in all of the affected states. Steve was recognized by Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich and Senator Barbara Mikulski for this work.

In 2007 Mr. Kanstoroom was the sole Marylander to receive the Civil Justice Award that year, presented for his work in spearheading legislation to impose penalties on insurance companies failing to pay claims in good faith in Maryland (legislation that Governor O'Malley signed). Also in 2007, after the County refused to act, Steve was successful in his efforts to halt large-scale illegal dumping adjacent to the Patuxent River. Simultaneously, he studied and developed recommendations to improve the quality and consistency of the county Department of Permitting Services procedures, after exposing an unlicensed layperson who masqueraded for years as a certified engineer for projects in the county and across the region.

But it is the plight of the "Farm Road" families of Sandy Spring that has garnered Mr. Kanstoroom's attention for the past six years, at considerable personal and financial cost. The lives of property owners in this African American kinship community were severely impacted when the Planning Department deleted their street addresses and refused to recognize the road that has served their properties since the late 1800s. Residents are now denied productive use of the properties that have been in their families for generations, including even the ability to rebuild their homes if damaged--an inequity that Steve intends to rectify. Steve Kanstoroom's activism has benefitted not only county residents but also citizens throughout Maryland and the nation. MCCF is pleased to give him the 2013 Wayne Goldstein Award.

This year **The Star Cup**, awarded to a Delegate or Committee of the Federation for outstanding public service on behalf of Montgomery County, is being presented to Virginia Sheard. Ms. Sheard began her volunteer civic activities in the early 1990s, quickly setting her focus on land use planning and zoning issues. Her education in special exceptions, rezoning, and the workings of the county Planning Board and Board of Appeals began while responding to plans for a development project in her Kensington View community. Virginia's efforts in successfully opposing that project led to her serving as a representative to Allied Civic, a now-dormant umbrella group of mid-county neighborhood associations, and her appointment to two terms as a member of the Mid County Citizens Advisory Board, where she worked on the visioning process for Wheaton redevelopment.

After signing on as a Kensington View delegate to the Civic Federation, in 2005 Ms. Sheard agreed to be a member of the MCCF Planning and Land Use Committee on which she still serves. Along with a small band of neighborhood cohorts, she participated for well over two years on the Wheaton CBD Sector Plan revision and on the legislative effort to create the medium and low density mixed-use Commercial/Residential Zones first employed in that plan. The precedents established in applying these new zones in the Wheaton Plan will benefit residents of all other county communities where they are used in future. Her efforts contributed to the Planning and Land Use Committee being awarded The Star Cup in 2010.

Virginia now splits her time between kiln-fired glass artwork projects (her true passion), input on the county Zoning Code Rewrite Project, and her work on the PLU Committee and as a Member At Large on the MCCF Executive Committee. She was also recently appointed as the Federation representative to the Streamlining Development Executive Committee charged with implementing strategies to improve the county development approval and permitting processes. MCCF is pleased to honor Virginia Sheard as the 2013 recipient of The Star Cup.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800 to 1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to montgomerycivic@yahoo.com