



### 2014 Kentucky Elected City Official of Year - Owensboro Mayor Ron Payne



Mayor Payne had a distinguished career in public service even before he became mayor having worked for the Cities of Owensboro as well as Oklahoma City in various finance, accounting and management capacities. He was also a professor of accounting at Brescia University, retiring in 2008. Beyond his vast knowledge of finances and accounting, there's certainly another side to Mayor Payne. A visionary, creative, gutsy and positive kind of leadership that has always demonstrated a "why not" instead of "why would we" attitude.

Though his position is part-time, Mayor Payne views his job as full time and is a hands-on mayor. He has been specifically instrumental in the revitalization of downtown Owensboro and in creating what has been one of the largest revitalization undertakings in the region. Not only has the city's renaissance gotten the attention of Kentuckians but it's been profiled in the New York Times, Forbes and several other publications.

Under Mayor Payne's leadership, Owensboro is now on the other side of an 11-year planning and development process that has produced more than \$200 million in public and private development. The downtown streetscape has been transformed. Businesses have come in and come back to Owensboro. Its River Walk and river front have been completely transformed with new parks and entertainment areas, a world class convention center and two hotels. A great lesson from Mayor

Payne's story is how he leads. The Owensboro City Commission has been behind him. He's a bridge builder. A team builder. And, the city never bit off more than it could chew financially because the mayor obtained grants and brought in private development in addition to committing to city funding. While it wasn't always easy, he also brought the public around and now Owensboro is truly a destination city for travel, conferences, business, development and young families. Mayor Payne's work will leave a lasting impact on Owensboro. He will be forever known as a people's mayor. But, he's also an employee's mayor. In fact, it was his employees who submitted his nomination for this award, which read in part, "He is highly accessible and will work to get any job done. He does so with finesse. His leadership and vision for the City of Owensboro have set the standards of excellence that every department and employee strives to meet."



### **2014 City Employee of the Year**

#### **Jennifer "Jenny" Clark- Deputy City Clerk in Princeton.**

To say Jenny does it all is an understatement. Princeton Mayor Gale Cherry describes her as imaginative, versatile and flexible, and an employee who goes well beyond her job description to see the big picture. As a ten year employee of the city, Jenny's list of accomplishments is outstanding. She transferred several city systems online, she established digital record keeping, she worked with local tourism efforts on a tourism and branding campaign, she created the city's first interactive website, and much more. She is respected by colleagues and community constituents alike and is truly an outstanding ambassador for the city, representing Princeton with many regional and state groups. Mayor Cherry said not only has Jenny's work benefited the city but her work ethic has raised expectations for other employees. And, perhaps mostly importantly, her attitude and team willingness to jump in and assist any city department any time makes her the ultimate team player. When the public works department was overrun with weed issues around the city, Jenny asked if she could be certified to spray herbicides and obtained a second tier certification. So, Jennifer Clark is not afraid to get dirty and get down in the weeds for her city— literally. Mayor Cherry probably said it best. "Jenny is the kind of employee we all feel lucky to have."

## **2014 Kentucky League of Cities Enterprise Cities Award winners**

### **Planning/Branding and Economic Development**

**City of Simpsonville** for its efforts in attracting the Outlet Shoppes of the Bluegrass, on I-64 within the city limits. Simpsonville is now one of Kentucky's premiere shopping destinations with the state's only outlet mall which includes 85 high end businesses. Not one or two new businesses, but 85 stores, more than 1,000 jobs and an initial private investment of \$80 million in Simpsonville. This success story is one of collaboration. When a private investor dropped by city hall a couple of years ago with some questions about development, city officials took him seriously. And, the rest is history. The city worked with the county, the state, and local residents. The zoning board worked with the private developer to maintain compliance every step of the way. City leaders travelled to other outlet malls and held developers accountable to make sure the structure was aesthetically pleasing and right for their city. And most importantly, the city engaged the public on all aspects of the Outlet Mall project including choosing the name Outlet Shoppes of the Bluegrass. It's estimated that 4 million people annually will visit Simpsonville. Tourism has exploded and property taxes have already been reduced due to new investments. Two restaurants have opened with more on the way in addition to hotels and other businesses. While not every city can have an \$80 million mall, what Simpsonville, population 2,484, proves that little cities can dream big.

### **Public Safety**

**City of Paducah** for its "Don't be Intexticated" education program. On September 1, 2007, 26-year old Hillary Coltharp was driving her convertible on Interstate 24 to meet her family for dinner. At 7:01 p.m., she began responding to text messages. She lost control of her car, rolling three times and was ejected 75 feet. By 7:02 she lay unconscious on the interstate. She was given less than a one percent chance to live. But, she did. Her body and brain are not the same nor is her purpose in life. Hilary now works with the Paducah Police Department, spreading the word about the dangers of distracted driving and the fact that texting and driving are illegal. A family friend, Paducah Police officer Gretchen Morgan, worked with Hilary and family to create the "Don't be Intexticated" program. Launched in 2012, the 45 minute presentation is presented to high schools and other groups by Paducah police officers- and Hillary. The presentation shows graphic photos of Hillary's car, her journey through surgery and therapy and includes her first person testimony. To date, the program has reached more than 4,000 teenagers in area high schools. Recent grants, including the Enterprise Cities Award funds, will allow the program to expand to high schools around Kentucky. Hillary's horrific accident has now become a mission for her ... and for her home town police department. In May, The Paducah Sun recently wrote an op-ed about this incredible city program. It read in part, "Our region is fortunate to have Hillary Coltharp and the Paducah Police program as perhaps the most effective program in the state to communicate the dangers and consequences of distracted driving."

### **Empowering Youth and Engaging Citizens**

**City of Raceland** for its EK Bikeway initiative. Did you know that before there was Keeneland race course, John Keene built a thoroughbred race track in Raceland, Kentucky in 1924? Fast forward 90 years. Raceland Police Chief Donald Sammons knew there was great interest in biking and bike racing in eastern Kentucky so with its racing history as a starting point, the City of Raceland decided to go from horse power to pedal power and establish what has quickly become one the nation's busiest destinations for biking enthusiasts. In less than a year, what started as several miles of trails has now become the Eastern Kentucky or EK Bikeway. The trailhead that originates in Raceland has expanded trails to include in Kentucky, Ohio and West Virginia. It includes six Kentucky counties as well as areas of Greenbo Lake State Park. Raceland's plan is to eventually include more than 500 miles of mixed use trails including biking, hiking, walking, mountain biking and horseback riding. The city's strategy is one of teamwork. Local high schoolers have decorated the trail head, local businesses and property owners have refurbished downtown buildings. A new book store and antiques shop have gone in and a restaurant that had planned to close stayed open and is seeing a tremendous boost as a result of the bikeway. The city has also added parks, gardens and green spaces for not only bikers but residents to enjoy. And, the city is working with the state parks, tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism offices to further brand the EK Bikeway and dramatically increase tourism and business potential in Raceland and this eastern Kentucky region. It all started with one police chief who thought this little city with a history of horse racing could begin a new history of bike racing. Raceland held its first competitive bike race in August. Like the thoroughbreds that once ran in Raceland, the city is determined keep moving forward.

### **Environment/Revitalization**

**City of Frankfort for its Historic Preservation Grant Program.** It's a simple idea. To reduce blighted property and improve historical areas, why not establish a city grant and loan program for people to fix up their houses? That's just what the city of Frankfort did.

In January 2014, the Frankfort City Commission approved the establishment of Frankfort's Historic Preservation Grant Fund. The city used a reimbursement from the Kentucky Capital Development Corporation to establish the \$40,000 matching grant fund. Local property owners applied for grants and three were awarded and presented during a City Commission meeting this summer. The recipients will have one year to make the changes and bring their properties fully up to code. The specific purpose of the program was to rehab historic areas including several downtown and residential areas but it did much more. The program had more applicants than funds which confirms the need for it. In addition, the Historic Preservation Grant Fund triggered a new interest in historic preservation, investment and pride in some of the city's most beautiful areas. While the program took a lot of legal and administrative planning on the front end, if all goes well, the city hopes to expand it in the future and move forward on a similar historic preservation loan program as well.

### **The Small Cities Showcase Award**

**City of Manchester** for its Stay in Clay initiative. "Stay in Clay", referring to Clay County is the definition of a public, private, community partnership. People in Manchester felt that Appalachia and parts of Eastern Kentucky are often portrayed with a negative bias and disparaging stereotypes. They wanted to change those perceptions of their community and generate local pride around all the great assets in

Manchester. The result was a completely citizen driven initiative called Stay in Clay.

Established as a separate nonprofit, Stay in Clay has been fully involved with city, the mayor and city officials since it began two years ago. Stay in Clay's mission is to empower local citizens with community pride and volunteerism. The initiative has brought together the city, the county, business, the arts community, preservationists, young people, older people, athletes, gardeners and many more. The great thing is they all have one goal - to build a strategic plan to improve tourism and quality of life, and to retain business and residents. In its short history, the Stay in Clay initiative has launched the Salt Work Homecoming Festival, established two local theater companies, developed a tourism commission, secured funding for park beautification and downtown revitalization and sponsored the development, naming and branding logo of Manchester and Clay County as the "Land of Swinging Bridges." And those projects are just the beginning.

"Stay in Clay" is a living, growing, organic initiative by and for the people of Manchester. The city, in its role, has empowered citizens to actively embrace their own community and begin to set its path for a bright future.