Two Wellston Residents Recognized for Commitment to Community

Jackson County Residents Honored with Jenco Awards for Service to Community

WELLSTON, OH – Jackson County residents Grant Plummer, a junior at Wellston High School, and Tami Phillips, co-founder of Make Wellston Beautiful, might be in very different places in life – but they have one major thing in common: a dedication to serving others. It is that dedication to service that brought both Plummer and Phillips to the stage of Stuart’s Opera House on September 27, 2018, where they, along with four other regional leaders, were awarded the 2018 Jenco Awards by the Jenco Foundation Fund at the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO).

Since 2002, the Jenco Awards have recognized the region’s unsung heroes, who have devoted themselves to direct, caring action that contributes to the quality of life in Appalachian Ohio. Nominated by fellow community members who witness their service and leadership in action, Jenco Award honorees are selected through a formal committee process and review. Jenco Award recipients receive an individual cash award to use in the manner most appropriate to their leadership.

Grant Plummer was selected for a Jenco Award due to his commitment to service and community leadership from a young age. Plummer first committed himself to civic involvement at the age of nine, when he began work with the Wellston Historical Association. Now the group’s Deputy Secretary, Plummer has worked to create their promotional slogan, regularly design brochures, attend meetings, and advocate for historical preservation.

"Young people are not always recognized as active participants, capable of bringing something to the table in their communities, and that perception can teach us that our voices don’t matter," Plummer said. "However, we are just as affected by what happens in our communities as everyone else, and we are just as capable of making change. Everyone I’ve met through community service has welcomed me with open arms, and I hope my story shows other young people that their voices do matter and that they don’t have to wait to make an impact."

In addition to the Wellston Historical Association, Plummer has committed himself to a variety of other causes. Recently, he has helped businesses market their storefronts by taking photographs and gathering information for the businesses’ Facebook pages. Additionally, according to Wellston Mayor Connie Pelletier, who nominated Plummer for his award, Plummer conducted research that was instrumental in assisting the City of Wellston with its successful, $500,000 Revitalization Grant application, which will allow for the construction of new waterlines in Wellston.
Plummer is also involved in two other community organizations, including Wellston Main Street, which is working to revitalize Historic Downtown Wellston, and Make Wellston Beautiful, which seeks to beautify the community and improve recreation activities, youth sports, and parks in Wellston. He has designed numerous pamphlets, brochures, and flyers for both groups, and he is in charge of the Facebook page and website for Make Wellston Beautiful.

It is no surprise, given a commitment to service in the small town of Wellston, that Plummer would cross paths with another community leader: Tami Phillips, who founded Make Wellston Beautiful seven years ago. The project initially filled community needs through volunteer landscaping, but the project has since grown dramatically.

In order to assist the city in obtaining grant funding for community projects, Phillips incorporated her group, which was soon awarded a $300,000 grant to beautify blighted areas of the city. To collect data for the application, Phillips knocked on the doors of half of Wellston’s residents.

In total, Make Wellston Beautiful has helped the City of Wellston secure $1.7 million in grants for the city and its programs, improving city softball and baseball fields, revitalizing the historic railroad depot for community use, and more.

“When I helped start Make Wellston Beautiful, I had no idea what it would become,” Phillips said. “Each of us in the group is committed to making our town a better place, so we continually do more and more to advance that goal. We didn’t expect to take over a sporting complex or help the city secure so much in grant money – but the desire to do good for our community led us there.”

Through all the endeavors of Make Wellston Beautiful, Phillips has played an instrumental role, and it is this impact on her community that earned Phillips a Jenco Award.

“It has been one of the highlights of my life over the past several years to serve on the Jenco Awards review committee,” said Carolyn Fisk, fund representative for the Jenco Foundation Fund. “Every year I am amazed at the innovative ways ordinary people do extraordinary things that make their communities better places, and this year was certainly no exception. This group of awardees have committed themselves to the spirit of giving embodied by Father Jenco by making our neighborhoods more beautiful, building community with free meals, preserving the history of the region’s most marginalized, and more – collectively making our region a brighter and happier place to live.”

In addition to Phillips and Plummer, this year’s honorees included:
- Ada Woodson Adams of Athens County, who is president of the Multicultural Genealogical Center in Morgan County, where she collects and preserves resources on the region’s African American and multicultural history for others to reference and study;
- Dan Palmer of Lawrence County, who has sought to curb the impact of the opioid epidemic by organizing drug take-backs and collecting basic necessities for local children;
- Elizabeth ‘Liz’ Shaw of Meigs County, a tireless advocate for better broadband connectivity in the region who also spreads Appalachian culture through music lessons and performances; and
- K. Allene Kilgore of Athens County, who launched a weekly free meal 20 years ago and oversaw the growth of the event to serve over 100 meals per week.
The Jenco Foundation Fund and its annual award are named for Father Lawrence Martin Jenco, a Roman Catholic priest who committed his life to the service of others. Most notably, in the 1980s, Father Jenco served as the director of Catholic Relief Services in Lebanon, where he was eventually kidnapped and spent 19 months in captivity. Even in captivity, Father Jenco continued to serve, providing a necessary listening ear for others detained, including journalist Terry Anderson. Although Father Jenco passed away in 1996, Mr. Anderson created the Jenco Foundation to continue Father Jenco’s legacy of compassion and giving.

Because the stories of Jenco awardees deserve to be shared and celebrated widely, the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio is partnering with Only in Appalachia, a student run organization aiming to re-write the Appalachian narrative through the power of positivity, authenticity, and storytelling. FAO and Only in Appalachia have come together to produce videos about the 2018 Jenco Award recipients, including Plummer and Phillips, which will be released weekly on both FAO and Only In Appalachia social media channels, starting September 30.

If you know someone in the Appalachian Ohio region who goes above and beyond the call of duty in service of others, please nominate that individual for the 2019 Jenco Foundation Fund Awards. The nomination window opens annually in the spring; in the meantime, sign up for the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio’s e-newsletter at www.AppalachianOhio.org or follow FAO on Facebook to hear when the call for 2019 nominations is released.

For additional information about the Jenco Foundation and the award that honors Father Lawrence Martin Jenco, please visit www.AppalachianOhio.org/Jenco or call 740.753.1111.