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# KENTUCKY

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## Walter A. Baker, the Consummate “Public Man,” to Receive the Hellard Award for Public Service

FRANKFORT, KY (October 20, 2003)—Walter A. Baker, a Glasgow attorney with a reputation for public service that has extended to the international stage, is the recipient of the 2003 Vic Hellard Jr. Award. The award, presented annually by the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center Board of Directors, recognizes an individual for his or her contributions to the future well-being of the Commonwealth. It will be presented at the Center’s 10th annual conference in Louisville at the Kentucky International Civic Center.

“Walter Baker is a man who gets things done, a wonderful public servant, and one of Kentucky’s really first-rate citizens,” observed historian Dr. Thomas Clark. “He has been a prime mover in modernizing Kentucky’s educational systems and developing the History Center in Frankfort . . . he is a *public man* who makes living in this Commonwealth worthwhile.”

A native of Columbia in Adair County, Baker went from this small rural community to one of the nation’s largest cities and its most prestigious university, Harvard. Undaunted by the challenge, he graduated *magna cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa and went on to earn a law degree, also from Harvard.

What followed has been a remarkable and distinguished career of public service. Indeed, over a career that now spans more than 40 years, Walter A. Baker has arrived on virtually every short list of Kentucky’s most respected public servants, serving in key elected, appointed, and voluntary posts and receiving accolades for his work in each of them.

Baker’s remarkable career has included national as well as state service. As a Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserves, Baker served as a Judge Advocate with the Kentucky Air National Guard for 20 years and was called to active duty for more than a year. He was awarded medals in 1969 and 1981 for meritorious service.

Between 1981 and 1983, Baker served as the Assistant General Counsel for International Affairs for the U.S. Department of Defense in the Secretary’s office, receiving an award for outstanding public service in that post.

Baker’s wealth of experience has also helped other nations meet the challenge of framing a new democracy. In 1995, Baker was selected by the U.S. Information Agency to advise the emerging Russian democracy on the legislative process and the construction of a constitution, and later in 1997 to address an economic conference in Poland.

Prior to his work with the federal government, Baker served terms in both houses of the General Assembly, rising to the post of Minority Caucus Chairman in the Senate and serving as Vice Chair of the Senate Appropriations and Revenue Committee. During his tenure as a legislator, Baker was recognized in virtually every session by the Capitol press corps, first as the outstanding freshman Senator, then subsequently as the most valuable member of his party and,



in the 1978 session, as the most outstanding orator in the Senate. Numerous other accolades followed.

During his tenure as a legislator, Baker was active in the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), serving as a member of delegations to China, Germany, and Japan, and as a member of the national organization's Law and Justice Committee.

In 1989, Baker's reputation made him a logical choice for inclusion on the Sixth Circuit Nominating Commission's short list (three attorneys) of recommendations for appointment to the U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit. In 1996, the governor appointed Baker to the Kentucky Supreme Court.

Baker presently serves on the Board of the Council on Postsecondary Education and as President of the Kentucky Historical Society. Over the years, he has served on a number of boards, as well as task forces and commissions charged with studying topics ranging from health care and educational reform to criminal sentencing and legislative ethics.

Given in recognition of service in the interest of Kentucky's future, the Hellard Award is given in memory of Vic Hellard Jr. and in honor of his long and distinguished career of public service. As Director of the Legislative Research Commission, Hellard was a tireless champion of legislative independence, considered by many to be the cornerstone of modern governance in Kentucky. He is also widely credited as the principal architect of the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center. At the time of his death in 1996, Hellard, who had retired from his LRC post, was serving as a member of the Center's Board, contributing substantially to its guidance and efforts to shape a vision for the future of the state and a system for evaluating progress toward its realization.

Previous winners of the Hellard Award are: *Judge Anthony M. Wilhoit*, retired Chief Judge of the Kentucky Court of Appeals and now Executive Director of the Kentucky Legislative Ethics Commission; *Joseph W. Kelly*, who served as chairman of the Kentucky Board of Education from 1991 until April of 1998, a period of far-reaching change for education in Kentucky; *Mary Helen Miller*, a retired state government executive whose career began in the classroom and went on to include high-level posts in both the legislative and executive branches under two governors; veteran journalist *Al Smith*, a former newspaper publisher, editor, and reporter, and one of the state's most engaging and enduring media personalities; renowned State Historian for Life, *Dr. Thomas D. Clark*, author of more than 20 books, recipient of countless awards, and the founder of the Thomas D. Clark Foundation, a private, nonprofit foundation that provides financial support for the University Press of Kentucky; and *Virginia Fox*, long-time Executive Director of Kentucky Educational Television, who helped bring public television into the Kentucky classroom and the 21st century.

To register for the Center's conference, "At the Crossroads: Prospects for Kentucky's Educational Future," where the Hellard Award will be presented, go to the Center's web site at: [www.kltprc.net/conference2003.htm](http://www.kltprc.net/conference2003.htm) or contact the Center for further information.

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