



Finalists for the 2018 Vic Hellard Jr. Award

The 2018 Vic Hellard Jr. Award will honor a former nonpartisan Legislative Research Commission staff member who exemplified high standards in service to the Kentucky General Assembly. The award is named in memory and recognition of longtime LRC Director Vic Hellard Jr., who was a champion of legislative independence and played an instrumental role in the modernization of the legislative institution and nonpartisan staffing.



Gordon Adkins

Gordon Adkins was a fixture around the State Capitol for nearly a quarter century, most notably as the Legislative Research Commission's Telecommunications Supervisor. During his time at LRC, Adkins was known for both his gentle manner and humor as well as the seriousness in which he approached each of his professional duties, including his responsibility to oversee and maintain telecommunications wiring systems important to the agency's smooth functioning. Adkins, who passed away in 2017, never lost his reverence for the responsibility he and his LRC coworkers shared to serve the Kentucky General Assembly and citizens across the state who wanted a connection to the legislative process. When, in 2015, the Senate and House chambers received their first major renovations since the State Capitol first opened more than 100 years before, Adkins was instrumental in the efforts to modernize the infrastructure of the chambers while preserving their historic integrity in architecture and design. A letter nominating Adkins for the Vic Hellard Jr. Award stated that he "did not shape legislation, but he supported every effort of every employee and legislator who worked toward that end. ... Gordon approached every task with willingness, good humor, and his signature laugh, whether it was his job to or not." Adkins' appreciation of his coworkers extended outside the workplace as he captained the LRC team in Frankfort's Commonwealth Gold League for over a dozen years. "He was as dedicated to every entry-level employee as he was to the highest-ranking government official," according to an award nomination letter. "He attacked every task with unparalleled knowledge and dedication."

Joyce Honaker

Joyce Honaker served the LRC for 32 years –from 1971 until her retirement in May 2003. Not only did she serve lawmakers with competence and professionalism, she served as an unwavering role model to her coworkers. Honaker was Committee Staff Administrator (CSA) of the State Government Committee – one of the largest and busiest committee staffs in the agency. She understood the critical role of staff in the legislative process and how much members of the General Assembly rely on staff members to oversee the complexities of that process. Honaker also knew – and exemplified to other staff – that in addition to bill drafting, strong research and policy analysis were critical to the effectiveness of staff support to legislators and the lawmaking process. In fact, she excelled in that area. As a manager, she knew the appropriate balance of guidance and independence that staff needed for their optimum professional development. Many future CSAs served under her tutelage, and many staff who worked under her supervision praised her managerial acumen. Honaker was instrumental in leading the General Assembly’s redistricting efforts in three cycles. She led a large team of analysts, mappers, secretaries and others to redraw boundaries for the state’s legislative and congressional districts. Through what can be a contentious process, Joyce was a trusted and steady leader. At her retirement, Honaker’s expertise in redistricting was acknowledged by leaders in all three branches of state government. Honaker had a firm belief in the collaborative effort of problem-solving. She took advantage of instructional and networking opportunities through the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and was one of the founding members of the Research and Committee Staff Section (RACSS) in 1987. She served as the staff section’s first chair person in 1987-88. Under her leadership, RACSS began a concerted effort to broaden its scope and expand professional development opportunities to a broader range of staff professionals. NCSL also selected Honaker to travel abroad and work with staff in newly developing countries like Namibia, Nigeria and Hong Kong as a consultant. As her nomination states, “her contributions to strengthening staff and enhancing public trust in the legislative branch of government, which started here in Kentucky, expanded nationally and internationally.”





Jim Swain

Jim Swain's information technology expertise helped shape the evolution of the Information Age for the Kentucky General Assembly. Swain started work in LRC's information technology section in 1981 at a time when the office was in its infancy. He was a key player in the expansion of the area through the '80s and early '90s. Throughout this period, he pushed for automation of basic tasks as a way to streamline government and allow LRC to become recognized as a forward-thinking, effective agency that served the legislature and the public with distinction. In 1996, he became Chief Information Officer for the agency and continued to push for innovation as the internet age bloomed. He oversaw the development of LRC's first web presence and its continual progression over the next 20 years. His work provided the public with ever-increasing access to the legislative process and attracted a diverse and skilled collection of people to LRC who continue to break ground in IT innovations to this day. Swain's understanding of how the legislature, staff, and constituents interact with technology was the foundation for the continued success of LRC's automation, outreach, and efficiency efforts. Though Swain's skills were well known, he was perhaps most recognized for his smile, positive attitude, and unfailing good humor. A letter nominating Swain for the 2018 Vic Hellard Jr. Award states: "He was a symbol of government working for the people of Kentucky, providing them with better, faster information and better access to their legislators as well as giving their legislators the ability to absorb more data and efficiently accomplish more in response to their constituents. Jim always saw technology, not as an end in itself as many people in IT do, but as a tool for increasing the interactivity and efficiency of government. He resisted the temptation to grow comfortable with what he knew and continually pushed for smart innovation, maximizing the effectiveness of the LRC's tiny technology office to serve the entire state of Kentucky in an outsized fashion."

The winner of the 2018 Vic Hellard Jr. Award will be announced later this month.