

DALE MILLER WINS SAGAMORE OF THE WABASH AWARD

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He didn’t see it coming. He didn’t think he fit the profile. He was just proud to be celebrating the longevity of his family’s company.

And for Miller Pipeline’s successful history in business and in Indiana, Dale Miller was awarded the Sagamore of the Wabash award, the highest honor bestowed by the Governor of Indiana – a personal tribute usually given to those who have contributed greatly to the Hoosier heritage. “It was a complete surprise. I had no idea it was coming,” said Miller of receiving the award from the late Gov. Frank O’Bannion’s representatives at the company’s 50th anniversary open house in June.

Though he accepts the meaning behind this award, he unabashedly thanks the employees who have dedicated their careers to the company and helped make Miller Pipeline a formidable rival among industry leaders. “Of course it’s a huge honor, but the reason that I received it was because of the accomplishments of the company. I just happened to work for Miller,” he said, “I’m just like the quarterback of the team who gets the credit when the team wins.”

Many times, Dale Miller had been to Sagamore of the Wabash ceremonies and watched others receive the coveted award. It never occurred to him that he would be on the receiving end some day. “I’ve been at functions where someone had won it, but it was always astronauts, politicians – important people like that,” he said.

Created by Gov. Ralph Gates (1945-1949), the Sagamore of the Wabash award was fashioned after the Kentucky Colonel certificates. “Sagamore” is a northeastern American Indian tribe term to describe a lesser chief or a great man among the tribe to whom the true chief would look for wisdom and advice.

Since its inception, the award presentations have been as unique as the governors themselves. Supposedly, one governor wore a full Indian headdress while reading the scrolls. Gov. Robert Orr gave the award to Garfield the Cat, proving the recipient didn’t have to be human or even animate.

The governor can present as many as he wants during his administration and appoint without legislative affirmation or an additional signature. There is a nomination process for those unknown to the governor.

Recipients of the Sagamore of the Wabash Award are a varied group. They range from the famous (and infamous) to the ordinary citizen. These citizens were honored for their contributions to community service as well as advocacy groups.

The first Native American to receive the award was Iron Eyes Cody, the Cherokee actor famous for his tearful environmental pollution commercial. The first female recipient was Mildred French, the first Director of the Indiana Youth Council.

Other honorees include:

- Jaycie Phelps, who was honored at the age of 16 as a member of the bronze-medal team at the 1995 World Championships.
- Ryan White, who contracted AIDS through a blood transfusion and fought to remain in public school, receiving the award before his death at the age of 18.
- Brett Gibson, then age 19, was president of Mid-America Telephone Service.
- Gustave Streeter, a 104-year-old veteran of World War I, served as an artilleryman in France.
- Frederick Lee Kupke, who was held hostage in Iran.
- William Prather, Jr., president of the Hardee's restaurant chain, at the opening of the first Hardee's in his hometown Martinsville.

Celebrity recipients include evangelist Billy Graham, boxer Muhammad Ali, actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, violinist Itzak Perlman, pianist Van Cliburn, singer Willie Nelson, coach Bobby Knight, comedian Red Skelton, race car driver A.J. Foyt, astronaut Virgil Grissom and Presidents Reagan, Ford and Truman.

Certainly, Dale Miller is among a diverse group winners, but he humbly takes it all in stride. The award is displayed in his office, but insists it's for all of Miller Pipeline to share. "We've had a number of people who worked their entire careers at Miller Pipeline – the credit goes to a lot of people."

And what about the company's next 50 years? Miller hopes that second, third and even fourth generations will come work for the company, contributing to its future success. He's "hopeful that the company will continue to grow and prosper" and maintain its "ethical standards."

When it comes to remembering and honoring what's important to the growth and success of Miller Pipeline, Dale Miller breaks it down simply, "Equipment can be bought and sold, but people can't."

Source: "Sagamore of the Wabash, Jeffrey Graf, Reference Department, Indiana University Libraries, Bloomington.

www.indiana.edu/~librcsd/internet/extra/sagamore.html