

SPEECH PREAMBLE

The Coshoctonian award recognizes an individual's "long term contribution to the well-being and economic climate of the community." The recipient must be a resident of Coshocton County. It is not the "Coshoctonian of the Year" award; rather it recognizes the totality of a person's contribution to our community during his or her lifetime. There have been no posthumous awards.

The members of the selection committee are the Chamber President, the Chamber Past President, the Chamber Executive Director, a representative of the city government (usually the mayor), a representative of the county government (usually the Chairperson of the Commissioners), and a past recipient (usually the previous year's). After studying the nominations, the committee decides upon a recipient during a meeting chaired by me. Each year's selection has always been unanimous.

Once a person is nominated, they remain on the nominated list year to year. However, please do not assume a person you consider worthy has been previously nominated. The more nominations we receive, the more information we have on which to base our decision. All nominations are treated very confidentially.

Coshoctonian, 2008

There is an old saying that one reaps what one sows. But that is not always the case with this year's recipient. This year's recipient is a seed planter, and although he has reaped much of what he has sown, our community certainly will reap all that he has sown. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

Our recipient was born in Bowling Green, Ohio, but arrived in Coshocton with his family when he was 8 months old. I would say that pretty much qualifies him as a native Coshoctonian. But he hasn't lived here all his life. More about that later.

Our recipient attended Coshocton Schools – Sycamore, Bancroft and Central Junior High and High School. He graduated from Coshocton High School in 1935. He was and still is a prodigious reader. In fact he read so well during his grade school career that often he would read stories to the children who had difficulty reading, and his joy of reading planted his first seed: the love of education. American History was his favorite subject, but he also took courses in typing, bookkeeping and shorthand, skills that helped him land his first job: working for Western Union in Coshocton. Now for those of you too young to remember the importance of Western Union and its telegrams, well, it was like the U.S. mail on steroids. Across literally thousands of miles messages could be written and received within minutes. But, of course they had to be hand-delivered, and that is something our recipient did, even through all kinds of weather – including having to use leggings provided by Western Union on cold and snowy days. After several years at our local Western Union office, he was sent to Bloomfield New Jersey. That office closed during the depression of the 1930's and although it was moved to New York City, our recipient moved back to Columbus where he took a clerical job for the state government there, and later lost it when the then governor M.L. Davy was replaced by the new governor John Bricker. He then returned to the Western Union office in Coshocton. He often was paid an extra fifty cents for delivering a “singing telegram,” something that he enjoyed doing. He was also moved around in central Ohio, Cambridge, Dover, Massillon and Ashland as a vacation replacement messenger. While here, he met the love of his life right here where we are tonight, at a dance at the Lake Park Pavilion in 1940. Within a year he and Gertrude L. Mencer of Roscoe, were married and later produced two wonderful sons, Martin and Mervin, the next two seeds he planted. Shortly after his marriage he was transferred to the Western Union office in Newark. When World War II broke out,

our recipient was unable to serve due to physical requirements at that time. During the war years in Newark, Kaiser Aluminum and Owens-Corning had many government contracts which required careful and accurate transmission of numerous facts and figures. Our recipient recalls that this was very tedious work. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad brought in many Mexican immigrant workers and they often wanted to telegraph money home to their families in Mexico (does that sound familiar?). Since they could not speak English, and our recipient could not speak Spanish, he kept a map of Mexico and would have the immigrant point to the town or city where his relatives lived. But he also had a more somber duty. He, often accompanied by his wife Gertie, had to deliver the very sad telegraphic news of the loss of a son, husband, father, or brother in the battle for our country's freedom during World War II. A very difficult assignment indeed.

After the war, he moved back to Coshocton and briefly worked as a Metropolitan Life Insurance agent and for the Gleason Lumber company, but shortly thereafter, found the job that would really acquaint him with our community and we with him: supervising the men's department at the O'Neil store in downtown Coshocton, a job he held for 36 years. Our recipient loved that job – he loved the people with whom he worked, but especially he loved his customers. He would get to know all of them so well that he not only knew them by name, but also knew all their important sizes: suit, shirt, and pants. If a friend or relative would come into the store wanting to buy something for one of his customers, they could count on his knowing every important size and preferred style. He truly was the face of the O'Neil store in Coshocton. And it was there that he finally discovered his niche in life: getting to know, remember and love people, all sorts of people, and in that love the fourth seed was planted. He not only worked in the store, but also became the symbol of the store – often on call during any emergency. And there were times he would receive an urgent call to go down to the store to let in last minute shoppers late Christmas eve or even on Christmas morning. He's just that kind of man.

And he loved Coshocton. He passed up many opportunities for advancement in the M. O'Neil Company just so he could stay in Coshocton and make sure that his boys received the same fine education that Coshocton County Schools provided him. And that desire provided his boys the springboard to continue their education. Both of them graduated from college, Martin from Ohio University and Mervin from Rio Grande University. They both came back and taught in Coshocton County's River

View High School, teaching social studies and English, and both are now retired. Another fruitful blessing for our recipient from his carefully planted seeds.

While he was working at O'Neil's, he was also active in the Jaycees. Additionally, he chaired the first Chamber of Commerce auction on a flat bed truck parked on the court square. That year it brought in \$400. An impressive first beginning – and another seed planted which is still bearing fruit to this day. He is a long-term member of our Kiwanis club and is known for his weekly “words of wisdom.” He has served as President of the Kiwanis club and as the state Lt. Governor, which led him and his wife to travel to international conventions in Seattle, Washington DC, and Dallas. And while speaking of community service, he has also served on numerous fund raising drives for the Cancer and Heart Associations – more seeds planted, more fruit harvested.

Our recipient credits his mother for having the greatest influence on him by teaching him to both like and to help people. She took him to church – one that his grandmother along with eight other families began in Coshocton, the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which is now the Park United Methodist Church by merger. But after our recipient and Gertie were married, as she was a member of Roscoe United Methodist church he joined there with her, and has been a member ever since. And Gertie was also making a name for herself. She, for many years was a well-known teller at First National Bank and was pivotal in orienting and training many new tellers. For her outstanding service to her co-workers and the community, she was awarded the Woman of the year in 1975 from the Business and Profession Women's Association. Unfortunately for all, she died in 2002, an event of great sorrow for our recipient.

Our recipient's father was a natural mechanic, working in Bowling Green making trucks for our World War I effort, then moving to Coshocton when our recipient was 8 months old, and setting up a garage on the spot where Chase Bank is now. He later worked at Clow's and finally for Parish's, delivering milk and eggs door to door. But he was a happy-go-lucky type of fellow who would come home unexpectedly and say to our recipient, “Let's go fishing,” and his mom would pack a lunch and off they would go. Our recipient's sons remember our recipient doing the same for them – a wonderful experience sharing family life.

But life changed for our recipient the day he won first place for the most authentic costume at the 1973 Canal Days Festival. His garb – well, naturally, was as Johnny Appleseed.

Now, there really was a Johnny Appleseed. His real name was John Chapman and he was born in 1774 and died in 1845. It has been written that Johnny Appleseed lived by the teachings of the Bible and on the writings of the Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Chapman saw himself as planting not only seeds of apple trees, but also seeds of the word of God.

Swedenborg's doctrine was the appreciation of humane values. Everything on earth corresponds directly to something in the afterlife, so the natural world and the spiritual (or mystic) world are intimately interwoven. The key to righteous living is to do good without looking for recompense. To study and love nature promotes one's spiritual growth. An apple tree in bloom is both a natural process and a “living sermon from God.” We might call this nature worship in the guise of Christianity. To understand and preach this theology took intellect. Johnny Appleseed may have been eccentric, but he was no dummy.

And neither is tonight's recipient. His portrayal of Johnny Appleseed has led him all over our country. But the seeds he's planted have been ones of admiration, awe and inspiration about and for our community, whose center is the confluence of the Walhounding and Tuscarawas rivers, the same place where John Chapman walked and planted his seeds. Our recipient has appeared and planted seeds in hundreds of schools throughout Ohio and before many civic groups. And everywhere he goes, he gets rave reviews. He cherishes the letters he receives thanking him for his portrayal, especially the ones from young school children. He saves every one of them.

After retiring from O'Neil's, he worked for the Roscoe Hardware store, and served on the Roscoe Village council, which oversees improvements to buildings in keeping with the tradition of the canal town era, and served on the Roscoe Village Foundation Committee. He, at first volunteered to Roscoe as a tour guide, a job that was almost designed with him in mind, and was later employed by them, guiding many people and school children through the town teaching them about the virtues and trials of the Canal Days era, and the role Johnny Appleseed played in it.

He has also given speeches all across the country about local Indian folklore and a special speech on “Amazing Maize,” a talk about the history of growing and harvesting corn in Ohio.

Our recipient has also been involved with the politics of our city, serving on Coshocton’s City Council for 22 years. During that time he was instrumental in promoting the new firehouse, and the water and sewage department improvements. Even though a lifelong Democrat, he always ran for the “at large” council seat so that he could represent all the people of Coshocton, and we can only say about his service to our community, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Whimsically, when he was finally defeated in his last run for councilperson at large, he quipped, “Well, maybe I should run for Governor.” But he never let politics interfere with his judgment. And he also demonstrated foresight when serving on a commission studying the consolidation of our county’s school system in 1960, and their recommendations brought some fruition, because that began the River View and Ridgewood School District’s consolidations. More seeds planted – and more fruit harvested - this time for the betterment of education in our community. So, our recipient’s entire life has been one of sowing seeds, nurturing the delicate blooms, and watching them bear the fruit of benefits to all of us, our entire community, and we wish to honor him tonight and thank him for all the seeds he has planted and by nurturing them, brought them to fruition for the benefit of us all.

Johnny Appleseed’s epitaph reads, “He Lived for Others,” and that is a fitting tribute to tonight’s recipient of the Coshoctonian Award. It is with great honor that I recognize our own Johnny Appleseed living here among us, Mr. Jack R. Baumgardner.

Presentation:

Jack, on behalf of our loving and appreciative community for all the seeds you have planted for us, both as Johnny Appleseed and just by being you; for the fruit of your seed-planting which benefits us today and from this day forward, and for being a man who lives to serve others, I award you with this token of our immense appreciation for you, and for all that you have done to promote our community throughout Ohio and the entire world. May God continue to bless you and keep you.

Written and presented by Robin Coffman, April 25, 2008