2005 Light A Candle Award

The 2005 Light a Candle Award was presented by Scott McConnell, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Early Education and Development, to Jerry Christianson, John Davis, Don Fraser, and George Latimer.

Following is the presentation of this award.

Scott McConnell:

In 2002 the Center for Early Education and Development started a new Round Table tradition—the presentation of the Light a Candle award. This award is made biannually at each Round Table and is presented to an individual or a group that successfully promotes ties between research, policy, and practice to improve the lives of young children in Minnesota and throughout the world. The award was originally inspired by a speech given by the late Senator Paul Wellstone where he talked about the importance of seeing the possibilities that each and every child brings to the world and the role that each of us can play in lighting a candle of hope for that child.

Two years ago we presented the first Light a Candle award to Dr. Mary McEvoy, a colleague of ours at CEED. Mary was an energetic visionary and passionate researcher and advocate who worked on behalf of young children. Her work, her commitment set a very, very high bar for future recipients of this award. I must admit that today’s recipients raise that bar even higher. I’m pleased to announce that the 2005 Light a Candle award for linking research, policy, and practice in early care and education will be presented to Messrs. Jerry Christianson, John Davis, Don Fraser, and George Latimer.

These four gentlemen, as individuals and as a group, are well known leaders and citizens of our state. Their career accomplishments are stunning. Just a summary of things that these four men individually and together have accomplished:
Among them, we have the former Mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul; a member of Congress; a Superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools, not once but twice, including one time during a very politically turbulent time of desegregation in the sixties; Dean of the Hamline Law School; State Department Commissioner; Director of the Children’s Theater; Senior Federal Department Advisor; husband; father; grandpa; protégé; and advisor. These are accomplished men.

In short, each of these men produced far more than enough laurels to rest on for quite some time. Fortunately for us and for the kids of Minnesota, they did not rest. Starting about seven years ago and growing out of an informal reading group in which they decided to educate themselves about issues affecting young children’s development, these four “guys” became an informal and powerful advocacy organization for early care and education. They thought it might be a good idea to advise governors, so they did. They thought it might be a good idea to inform candidates for elected office about the importance of young kids’ development and about what they could do to improve children’s development, so they did. They thought it might be a good idea to engage others in this conversation, so they invited decision-makers and opinion-makers to George’s office at Macalester, to what many of us refer to as “Don’s office” at the Dunn Brothers over on University Avenue, or to just about any place that these folks would meet so that they could talk to them about the importance of supporting young kids’ development. Quite literally, they shaped what became the larger, more energetic discussion that we all know right now in this state about the importance of early care and development.

They also gave of their own time, volunteering on boards, convening discussion groups, writing op/ed pieces for the paper, and tutoring children. With every step of this journey, their passion and their dedication to the topic of early care and education grew.

I’m sorry to say that I don’t know any of these four as well as I wish I did but I think it is characteristic of them from my experience and that of others that as individuals and as a group, they’re inclined to avoid credit or to avoid the center stage for their contributions to early education. But I think you can see their fingerprints everywhere—in the discussions that they’ve started, in the individuals that they’ve mentored, in the children that they’ve tutored, in the contributions that they’ve made.

For these contributions, for the ways in which they’ve shed light on the importance of early care and education in Minnesota, the Center for Early Education and Development is very delighted to deliver to each of them the Light a Candle award for 2005. Thank you both very much.
JOHN DAVIS

I’m surprised and I am honored, and I am happy to be here. Joy, my wife, is happy to be here. I’m quite cognizant of the fact that to stand in a sense in the great shadow of Mary McEvoy is really a distinctive honor. I’m glad that we knew her and I hope all of you knew her, and I trust that the great commitment she had will be followed by you and led by you. I know that is the case.

I wondered if we’d be called to talk so I wrote what I want to say. I found what I wanted to say. I begin by saying we are a nation yet unfinished, and we have justification for that being “unfinished” by the following assertion:

We the people of the United States in order to form a more perfect union establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity to ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

We are as yet an unfinished nation and great is our commitment, great must be our effort. To begin as you are, with preschool, early childhood, prenatal is the way to begin. I salute all of you and I thank you for the privilege of being here.
GEORGE LATIMER

My main function with these wonderful older gentlemen was to pour the coffee. As I often told them, the only reason I continue to meet with them more than 75 times with different people in the field is that it’s the only time in my entire year that I’m the youngest person at the table!

John Davis, as always, has said it for all of us but just for the two colleagues who are not here, it was Jerry Christianson who every time we would flag or wonder what are we doing here, Jerry would say, “Now, George! We can make a difference!” He’d pick you up and he’d drive us forward. John Davis always kept us on the right course. In case we ever thought of anything but early childhood, Don Fraser would be there.

To them, and to Nancy Moore Latimer, who spent her whole adult life working on kids, I’m very devoted. I knew Mary McEvoy so well and admired her so much, this is clearly the greatest shared honor that we’ll ever have. Finally, I remember the words that you never have forgotten, the words of Garrison Keillor:

Nothing that we do for children is ever really wasted.

Thank you.

The 2005 Light a Candle Award was presented at CEED’s 2005 Minnesota Round Table in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on April 13, 2005.