

LaDDC News

DD Council Members and LaCAN Leader Recognized with Governor's Outstanding Leadership in Disabilities Awards

November 20, 2017

Governor Edwards and the Louisiana Governor's Office of Disability Affairs recognized fourteen individuals and organizations at the [2017 Governor's Outstanding Leadership in Disabilities \(GOLD\) Awards Ceremony](#) last week.

The Council is proud to announce that two Council Members, Mark Thomas and Lillian DeJean, and LaCAN Leader, Ashley McReynolds, were honored with 2017 GOLD Awards. Mark Thomas received the Public Servant of the Year Award. Lillian Dejean received the Youth of the Year, and Ashley McReynolds was presented with the Distinguished Merit Award.



Pictured above, left to right: Cooper McReynolds, Senator Dan Claitor, DD Council Deputy Director Shawn Fleming, Governor John Bel Edwards, First lady Donna Edwards, Award Recipient Ashley McReynolds.

Mark Thomas was recognized for his decades of outstanding achievement, leadership and devotion in service to people with developmental disabilities, the past ten of which have been as the head of the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities. Mark always keeps the people needing service at the forefront of every decision and action he makes. Furthermore, he works to instill those values in everyone working in the developmental disabilities system.

Lillian DeJean's accomplishments provide encouragement and inspiration to other young people with or without disabilities. Lillian's testimony to the House Ways and Means Committee for funding to support people with disabilities in their own homes was featured in an article in the Baton Rouge Advocate. She also won the regional Robot Design award as a CAJUN team member and advocated to save Medicaid at the U.S. Capitol.

Ashley McReynolds, the LaCAN leader for Region 2, was recognized for being instrumental in leading advocacy efforts to change laws, policies and practices that improve opportunities for people with disabilities to achieve full participation in society. These include pathways for students with disabilities to earn high school diplomas, a shift in the school accountability measures to more fairly count the achievements of students with disabilities, a more equitable funding formula for charter and traditional school systems relative to the numbers of students with disabilities served, and requiring Human Services Districts and Authorities to commit a minimum percentage of their funds to programs for people with developmental disabilities.

While Ashley's efforts at getting changes to laws and policies are impressive, she also works tirelessly with individuals in advocating for appropriate services and accessing the opportunities created through policy changes. Ashley is so well known and respected it was not surprising when Governor John Bel Edwards singled her out in his opening remarks for her outstanding achievements and efforts.

The Council congratulates all the recipients for their hard work and devotion to improving the lives of people with disabilities for which they were recognized today!

Recipients of the other GOLD Awards include: Jane Vernier, Patsy Barrett Memorial; Jay Isch, Ken Vince Memorial; Julie Bourgeois, Educator of the Year; Lillian Dejean, Youth of the Year; The Pierce Family, Family of the Year; Trach Mommas of Louisiana, Volunteer of the Year; University Medical Center, Employer of the Year; Terrebonne ARC, Provider of the Year; Latasha Walker, Direct Support Professional of the Year; Kenneth Carmouche, Veterans of the Year; Bella (Arc of Caddo-Bossier), Service Animal of the Year; Representative Patricia Smith, Elected Official of the Year.

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