

MEDIA RELEASE

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Two community champions receive the Bill Thake Memorial Economic Development Leadership Award

Community builders Janet Campbell and Wendy Merkley are this year's recipients of the Bill Thake Memorial Economic Development Leadership Award.

The winners were announced today at the 12th annual United Counties of Leeds and Grenville Economic Development Summit held virtually via live webcam and video.

"All of our nominees are champions in their communities," said Warden Pat Sayeau. "Leeds Grenville is a better place to live because of these active volunteers. We are proud to honour them for the major contributions they have made and continue to make."

Nominee Karen Bedard was recognized for her work in the Municipality of North Grenville. She is a founder and event director of the Kemptville Live Music Festival, leading a small army of volunteers to make the event possible for the past six years. Her team is working on hosting a virtual event in 2021.

This is the 10th anniversary of the Bill Thake Memorial Award, also called the Warden's Award. It is presented to community volunteers showing outstanding leadership resulting in the growth and vitality of the Leeds Grenville economy.

Winner Janet Campbell is founder and owner of Mrs. McGarrigle's Fine Mustard and Fine Foods, a cornerstone business for more than 32 years in the Village of Merrickville. Janet has a strong belief in the collective force of businesses working together. She is a leader in the promotion of Merrickville, Leeds Grenville and Eastern Ontario as a world-class destination. She is quick to promote local food and area products and has used her business to promote other area producers. One of her passions is mentoring new entrepreneurs.

"I'm very honoured," Janet said. "When I started in business there weren't many local producers. Now there is a wealth of talent in our back yard. People want to buy local and that is very exciting."

"The best thing I ever did was move to Merrickville. The local support has been overwhelming. It's really touching to know and have that real customer loyalty," Janet said.

Winner Wendy Merkley is co-owner of Andress Boatworks, a family-run marina in Rockport about to celebrate 100 years in business. She is Chair of the Friends of Rockport Customs House, a volunteer group which has worked hard to raise funds to purchase, redevelop and open an amazing riverfront property to the public for the first time. Through her efforts, the site now gives local people, as well as visitors, access to the St. Lawrence River and the 1000 Islands. Wendy led a team to rebuild the pier, raise and repair the building, keep the boat launch, and install benches and picnic tables.

"I accept this recognition on behalf of a team of people who over many years worked to make this happen," Wendy said in accepting her award. "I do love Rockport and I'm proud to be in rural Eastern Ontario and Leeds Grenville."

Over the past decade, 38 deserving women and men have been nominated and 13 individuals have received the award. Last year's recipient was Debbie Wilson from North Grenville. During his lifetime, Bill Thake was known for his leadership and mentoring skills. He served 52 consecutive years on Westport Council to set a Canada-wide record as the longest serving head of a municipality.

The summit is hosted by the Counties Economic Development Office in partnership with Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes MP Michael Barrett, MPP Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 1000 Islands, Valley Heartland and Grenville Community Futures Development Corporations, and the Eastern Workforce Innovation Board.

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