

# 2006 Florida Cities of Excellence Awards Program ▶

Category (Please check one) See Award Criteria for more information. Please print or type. One nomination per page.

Name of Municipality Nominated \_\_\_\_\_  
Nominated by \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of City/Town/Village)

Name of Municipality Nominated \_\_\_\_\_  
Nominated Project \_\_\_\_\_  
Nominated by \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of City/Town/Village)

Name of Individual Nominated \_\_\_\_\_  
Nominated by \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of City/Town/Village)

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Name of Individual Nominated Jim Tucker  
Nominated by City of Fort Walton Beach  
(Name of City/Town/Village)

Name of Individual Nominated \_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_ Department \_\_\_\_\_  
Nominated by \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of City/Town/Village)

Name of Individual Nominated \_\_\_\_\_  
Nominated by \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of City/Town/Village)

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Name of Individual Nominated \_\_\_\_\_  
Nominated by \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of City/Town/Village)

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**Florida League of Cities  
Cities of Excellence  
Council Member of the Year Award**

Name: Jim Tucker  
Title: Council Member, Seat 4  
Jurisdiction: City of Fort Walton Beach

When Jim Tucker was elected to Council Seat 4 in 1999, he arrived with passion and the belief that he had been elected to serve the citizens and make their government more accessible to them. For the past seven and one half years, he has worked diligently to ensure all citizens were served. A retired Army Colonel who owns a waterfront boat repair business, Council Member Tucker has shown great character, and been a “character,” during his Council tenure. During his two terms, he initiated the City’s groundbreaking Water Quality Initiative, was the driving force behind the City’s tree ordinance and status as a Tree City USA®, and has been a quiet philanthropist.

Without question, Mr. Tucker has contributed immeasurably to the quality of ground water in and around the City of Fort Walton Beach through the City’s Water Quality Initiative, which he proposed in 2003 and which continues to be implemented today. In the years prior to 2003, the coastal waters of Okaloosa County were experiencing a decline in quality due to sewage spills, red tide, illegal boat dumping, spills at condominium private lift stations and population growth in surrounding jurisdictions.

By 2003, Council Member Tucker plainly realized that water quality was an issue which affected the citizens of Fort Walton Beach in terms of both quality of life and economic viability, and decided it was not an issue that could be left to others to ensure. In a 2005

Florida League of Cities *Quality Cities* article, he explained, "I am on the water every day, and I see what is done to it and what it suffers through. I see the degradation caused by people using our local waters. If we don't do something about it, who will?"

It is this "can do" attitude that lead to a focused, multiple-faceted plan for surface water quality at the municipal level. On May 20, 2003, Council Member Tucker presented his plan for surface water quality in the City of Fort Walton Beach. His six-point plan, dubbed the Water Quality Initiative, included the following elements.

1. Require disconnection of remaining septic systems in the city.
2. Offer sewage pump-out facilities to boaters at no charge.
3. Establish an environmental specialist position to carry out Water Quality Initiative and related issues.
4. Ensure that existing laws are enforced in local waters.
5. Create a resolution outlining the city's water quality objectives and request endorsement by local governments.
6. Control stormwater runoff and lead the way in restricting pollutants entering local waters.

These six initial elements survive in the program today, but it has also come to encompass additional water quality issues, including the private lift station regulations resulting from the City's one-of-its-kind Private Lift Station Ordinance and a variety of grants related to water quality. In 2004, the City hired an Environmental Specialist, the point man for the Initiative, and last year, emphasis was placed on water sampling, private lift station registration, stormwater management, and plans review as they relate to wetlands. To fulfill one element of the Initiative, the City began partnering with the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance to implement a regional approach to stormwater issues, stormwater compliance and surface water quality through educational outreach, water sampling, engineering and technical support. Last year, with water quality grant funding,

the City was able to remove debris from hurricanes and rebuild retaining walls at four ditch systems in the City. Other grant funding provided for a sewage pump out facility at one of the City's waterfront parks to allow boat pump out at no charge, the second element of the Initiative, and for a stormwater inlet stenciling program to make people aware that inlets drain into the Choctawhatchee Bay.

To achieve the desired results of Mr. Tucker's Initiative, City staff members have taken an educational program to the public. Speaking to students and business leaders, and on television programs, the Utilities staff has provided residents with an awareness of what they must do to ensure the quality of surface waters, including reporting suspected illegal dumping of boat holding tanks, limiting the use of pesticides and herbicides in lawn maintenance, and disposing of oil and chemicals in the proper way.

After water quality, Mr. Tucker's second passion is certainly the preservation of trees. A tear sometimes forms in Mr. Tucker's eye when he speaks of watching citizens mow over young Live Oak saplings. When workers at a new development project cut down a large, old Live Oak tree last year to make way for a condominium project, he removed the stump and it became his private public awareness campaign for the community to understand what happens to many old, majestic trees. He convinced his fellow council members to allow the stump to be placed in the City Hall parking lot for thirty days with an "obituary" written by a local author attached to it. He also put up \$1,000 of his own money as a prize for a contest to write an obituary for the stump. The contest, covered by the local newspaper, drew over 30 entries, which were judged by the City's Tree Board.

While the contest drew many opinions on the newspaper's editorial page, it also drew awareness to the fate of many old trees in our community, which is exactly what Mr. Tucker endeavored to do. Some additional controversy arose when it was discovered that the winning entry was written by a felon at the Eglin Federal Prison, which prompted the Northwest Florida Daily News to write the headline, "Tree Essay Contest Inspires Bard Behind Bars." Mr. Tucker took it all in stride, and made plans for the Live Oak stump to appear in the annual Christmas Parade.

Due to this respect and love of trees, Mr. Tucker has long advocated for the City to develop a tree ordinance and a tree farm. While the tree farm has yet to be planted, the City developed a tree ordinance two years ago and has been designated a Tree City USA® for the past two years. The City is now considering provisions to protect historic trees in the City, such as the one which inspired Mr. Tucker to conduct the "tree obituary contest."

Finally, it must be noted that Mr. Tucker is a quiet philanthropist in Fort Walton Beach, supporting a wide variety of projects and groups, including the Friends of the Fort Walton Beach Library. At a recent event marking the completion of Phase I of the Friends' Library Lobby Enhancement Project, the Friends of the Fort Walton Beach Library President noted that while she knew he would not attend the gala and take any credit, the group received Mr. Tucker's City Council stipend on numerous occasions for the enhancements, making him one of the greatest supporters of the project. Over the years, it has become known that while he accepts his Council Member stipend, he quickly

gives it away to a cause in need of additional funds. Even more important, Mr. Tucker's passion for water quality has led him to provide private funding for stormwater projects at his commercial property to help alleviate run-off problems in the vicinity of his business, rather than wait for public funding. Mr. Tucker is the *walking talking* meaning of "put your money where your mouth is."

Even for those who don't necessarily agree with Mr. Tucker's ideas, it is hard not to respect his passion and determination to make the world better, or certainly not worse, than he found it. Fort Walton Beach is a far better place because of Council Member Tucker, and for this reason, he is particularly deserving of the title "Council Member of the Year."