

2008

Mayor of the Year Award Entry



Person Completing Nomination Form

Deborah Thatcher
Public Information Manager
City of Destin, FL
4200 Two Trees Road
Destin, FL 32541
(P) 850-837-4242
(F) 850-650-9250
dthatcher@cityofdestin.com

MAYOR CRAIG BARKER

Destin Mayor Craig Barker is zealous about preserving Destin's emerald green waters and fishing heritage and his leadership legacy will be in assuring that both remain a viable economic engine and centerpiece for the "World's Luckiest Fishing Village."

From a very early age, Mayor Barker's love of Destin's harbor, its bayous, its waterways and its fishing heritage was his delight. Craig began working as a deckhand in Destin's charter fishing fleet when he was only 14 years old. That summer job has since turned into more than a hobby as Barker founded *Kore Gear, Inc.* - a company formed in 2001 to commercialize an innovative new concept in fishing reel design. In fact, Craig's "9 to 5" job encompasses all aspects of this project including design, engineering, prototype manufacturing, patenting, and other duties that will soon culminate in the launch of *Kore Gear* on a global basis through the licensure of its assets.

Barker was first elected to the Destin City Council in 1996 at the age of 28, becoming the youngest elected official in the City's history. He was re-elected in 1998 to serve a second term. In 2000, Barker ran for and was elected to his first term as Mayor. Craig was re-elected Mayor of Destin in March of 2006.

Right from the start Barker carried his passion for Destin's fishing heritage into his leadership for the City as he began working to facilitate water quality initiatives and redevelopment efforts for the Destin Harbor.



MAYOR CRAIG BARKER

When the old pump at Destin Harbor began breaking down regularly, unable to keep the harbor flushed and clear, Craig stepped in. As an engineer, Craig worked long and hard with many other experts to determine the best pump design for Destin Harbor that could efficiently and cost-effectively keep the harbor waters flushed and fresh. The resulting new harbor pump is of innovative design and has been working flawlessly since 2004; the harbor's water quality continues to improve. But, the Mayor works on. His latest initiative to improve water quality is for the City to provide free pump-out service to all boats in Destin waters. This innovative program, to be funded in part by a grant from The Clean Vessel Act Program, is proposed to begin next spring.

For more than 20 years Destin's business and civic leaders tried – and failed to garner support for a plan to build a public boardwalk along the north shore of the City's harbor. A boardwalk that would serve as home to Florida's biggest chrater fishing fleet, while being a popular gather place. Undeterred, Mayor Barker has spearheaded a third attempt to gain support for this initiative by bringing together more than 150 affected property owners and through these efforts the plan now enjoys broad-based approval from these stakeholders and the community at large. "One of the main reason the current plans work," Mayor Barker said "is because we pressed hard to make sure anyone – from the fishermen, to residents, to business



MAYOR CRAIG BARKER

people, and to developers – was involved and that whoever wanted to talk about the harbor’s future were heard.”

Barker said he believes preserving public access to the harbor is imperative. “It’s no secret that Destin’s beachfront has slowly become privatized as residential condominium development has occurred,” he said. “Without a master plan to prevent it from happening, market forces will drive condominium development along the north shore of Destin Harbor as well. Condominium development on the harbor would privatize the waterfront and drive visitors away—ultimately resulting in our famous charter fishing fleet being displaced in favor of private yachts. And, in my opinion that would ruin our history and heritage forever.”

The Mayor’s passion for public access to the harbor extends to Destin’s beaches as well. Because of so much privatization of beachfront property, the Mayor initiated through the city council the Henderson Beach State Park pass system. Now all residents of the City of Destin can access Henderson Beach State Park (a mile-wide beachfront park within the city limits) free of charge by picking up a one-year decal at City Hall. The City pays the park fee. Within the last two months of June and July, 1,873 passes were distributed.

Craig’s personal mission statement guides his tenure as Mayor. He says, “Every day I want to ensure my actions are geared toward creating a heritage our children can be proud to call their own.” And, speaking of children, one of Craig’s first initiatives as Mayor was to implement the Mayor’s Civic Award for outstanding



MAYOR CRAIG BARKER

students from the local elementary school. Each year, he holds this end-of-the-year ceremony to honor those students who have demonstrated exceptional civic citizenship. The students are thrilled. The teachers are excited. The principal is proud. The community benefits!

Mayor Barker was recently named one of the area's top young leaders. Within this group, some of the leaders are defined by their actions, others by their words. Craig is one of those few leaders who are defined by both their words and actions. For example, Mayor Barker is a vocal advocate for our fishing fleet and the fishermen's rights to earn a living from the sea. Whether it's attending federal or state meetings along the Gulf Coast from Mobile to Panama City or picking up the phone and asking for help, Mayor Barker is always there to let regulators know about his constituents' concerns on any potentially catastrophic effects a proposed government regulations could have on this the livelihood of Destin's working middle class. Craig is truly their unsung hero and they will tell you so!

Speaking of heroes, many of you may know that the Destin area is home to one of the largest military installations in the world, Eglin Air Force Base, including Hurlburt Field and Duke Field. In his previous occupation, the Mayor worked to provide engineering analysis and support for NASA's Star Wars Missile Defense Program, the US Army Strategic Defense Command, and the Air Force Development Test Center. This work kindled another of the Mayor's interest...his appreciation for the men and women who serve in the United States military.



MAYOR CRAIG BARKER

Each Thursday night during the summer, with the Destin Harbor as his backdrop, Mayor Barker honors a local service member for their service to this community by presenting them with a Key to the City. This event is co-sponsored by the Destin Harbor Association and has become one of the highly acclaimed events of the 100 days of summer in Destin.

When it comes to his philosophy on how to run a City, Craig believes that to be successful Destin must adopt an attitude that "business as usual" is no longer acceptable, and policy makers must resolve to look outside the box, and to concentrate on what could be - what should be! Barker's vision, as Mayor of Destin, is simple and clear - to provide services to our citizens in the most efficient, timely, effective and economical manner possible.

It is without hesitation and with unanimous approval that the Destin City Council nominates Mayor Craig Barker for the Florida League of City's Excellence Award as Mayor of the Year for 2008.

