



GREATER HICKORY INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL

*Respecting diversity; embracing commonalities in
Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties*

<https://hickoryinternationalcouncil.com>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The Greater Hickory International Council Awards Inaugural Rudy Wright International Service Award to Joseph Keller Thomas V

Hickory, NC—May 10, 2023— The Greater Hickory International Council awarded its first ever Rudy Wright International Service Award to Joseph Keller Thomas V. The award is named in honor of Wright, who served as Hickory Mayor from 2001 to 2017. Wright was a strong advocate of cultural awareness and tolerance. He established the Hickory International Council in 2002 to serve as a forum for the international community in Hickory and to advise the City Council regarding ways to improve Hickory as an international city that welcomes and values international visitors, residents, and businesses. The award recognizes an individual or organization, based within the 4-county Greater Hickory Metro Region (which includes Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties) that has made an outstanding contribution of goodwill, service, cultural awareness, tolerance, and/or global connectedness to their community. It is awarded annually and includes a thousand-dollar honorarium.



L to R: Tracey Trimble, Donna Wright, Joseph Keller Thomas V, and Hani Nassar

Joseph, a senior and class president at Maiden High School, volunteers his time and talents working with defendants at the Teen Court, a program offered through the Conflict Resolution Center. He represents teens of many cultural backgrounds and ethnicities on charges such as illegal possession of substances, affrays (fighting in a public place that disturbs the peace), and property damage.

Cultural awareness is a key component of his job as the defendants and the jury often come from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. In accepting his award, Joseph said, "I feel it is my mission to educate, communicate, and create empathy for my clients in the eyes of the jury so they have greater cultural

awareness and tolerance of any mitigating factors that could help to provide a better understanding of the defendant's actions. This allows them to create a more productive sentencing that helps these teens serve their time, while proactively growing and learning from their experience. They are then able to exit the teen court system in hopes of a better future while offering a more beneficial contribution to their communities." He continued, "Many of these teens actually decide to volunteer additional time and some even end up joining the teen court system permanently in an effort to help others like themselves." Joseph recruits youth from our area schools and encourages them to serve within the teen court system and the international communities as well.

Mayor Hank Guess and Donna Wright presented a plaque to Joseph which read "With deepest appreciation and recognition for the outstanding contribution you have made on behalf of the international community. By representing teens of different backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities, you have unselfishly devoted your time to advocating for cultural awareness, tolerance and understanding throughout our regional teen court judicial system for the betterment of all our communities." Ms. Wright added, "Rudy loved to travel and embraced all cultures and ethnicities. He would have been proud that this award bears his name and memory."

The council encourages members of the community to join and participate in its events. Any ethnic, cultural, or international group is also encouraged to provide information about their organizations and events to be included on the website. GHIC also awards grants each year to worthy individuals and organizations within the four-county region. Visit www.hickoryinternationalcouncil.com for more details.

A thousand-dollar honorarium will be awarded each year. Individuals and/or organizations are encouraged to apply, outlining the contributions they have made promoting goodwill, service, cultural awareness, tolerance, and/or global connectedness in their community. Applications are collected through the GHIC website at <https://hickoryinternationalcouncil.com/rudy-wright-international-service-award/>. The selection committee reviews applications in April and the winner is selected, contacted, and publicly announced the first week in May.

About The Greater Hickory International Council (GHIC)

The mission of the Greater Hickory International Council (GHIC) is to promote goodwill, cultural awareness, cooperation, education, and mutual respect through partnerships and internationally focused community events. If you are interested in joining GHIC, please contact Hani Nassar, President at hani@hickoryic.com . Visit www.hickoryinternationalcouncil.com for more information on all upcoming events and activities in 2023 and a list of international resources available in our 4-county communities.