

In celebration of the service of Karen Houston, Georgia Krueger, & Karen Toney  
2020, 2021, & 2022 recipients of the Jack Burney Community Service Award  
Presented by a grateful town on November 23, 2022

In this season of Thanksgiving, our Town has made it a habit—thanks to the generosity of the Burney family and the foresight of the WIMPS—to pay tribute to people who've offered Davidson the highest degree of servant leadership. COVID brought this tradition to an abrupt halt in November 2020, and for the last two years we've wrestled with how best to honor our most dedicated neighbors while remaining mindful of the risks of gathering.

Last year, when we felt we could wait no longer for the world to right itself, we forged ahead with a different type of celebration. Karen Houston, a true daughter of Davidson and a stalwart champion of the Town's first responders, was our committee's unanimous pick for the Burney Award. Karen often cooks delicious dinners for our first responders, and a seat at Karen's table is a coveted prize. At the time we thought there was no finer tribute to her years of service in support of our firefighters and police officers than to name Karen as the Grand Marshall of the Holiday Parade and commemorate the honor by presenting her with a custom-made fire helmet and shield.

Karen, whom many of us know as Kay, was reared in Davidson by her devoted mother Bernice Reading and with her sister Ruby by her side. It was here that she made friends, had family all around her, and grew into a lifelong rock in this community. When it is time to vote in Davidson, Kay drives throughout town, giving people rides to the polls. The Kay Houston Election Day Taxi has made it possible for hundreds of people to vote over past decades. She is determined that the sacred right to vote is everybody's right, and she does not listen to any protest about something like bad weather getting in the way of that vote. Rain or shine, Kay's smiling face is always in evidence at Town Hall, coming and going with her voters.

When COVID threw us all off our game, Kay didn't skip a beat. She turned that Election Day Taxi into a COVID Vaccine Taxi, making sure the neighborhood came out to the Ada Jenkins Center to keep us all safer. She stationed herself at Ada, greeting her friends both young and old, ushering them into the building, helping them register and making us all feel safe as we took those first tentative steps together.

While we couldn't gather here then in Town Hall to celebrate with Kay, I know many of us lined the parade route to wave, to shout, and to beam with pride as Kay led the way that day. That she rose to the potential of the day, undaunted by the wrench thrown at all of us by the pandemic, seemed testament to the service she has offered our community all these years—not least of which was helping to organize, promote, and staff our Town-sponsored COVID vaccine clinics.

Kay, as we stand here with Thanksgiving approaching, we are delighted once again to commend you for your service to the Town, for your long-standing support of firefighters and police officers, and for choosing the Fire Department as the recipient of your Burney Award donation.

Kay, a grateful Town salutes you again today!

In our eagerness to get the Burney ceremony and celebration back on track this year, the committee also decided to break with tradition one additional time, naming two honorees this year.

Georgia Krueger is our 2021 honoree. As in Kay's case, COVID wreaked a little havoc with the celebrations one might have expected to see honoring Georgia's long service to our community when she retired as Ada Jenkins' longest serving executive director in Spring 2020. We count ourselves fortunate to be able to add Georgia's name to the long list of Burney honorees on the wall here in Town Hall—even if it did take an extra year to make it happen!

Like the Burney winners before her, Georgia has sunk her soul into this Town, knitting us all together in a web of service. Her impact runs from the shores of the Lake Norman Y and the adaptive swim and water sports program she helped build through to the model of community support and empowerment that is today's Ada Jenkins Center. She is a whirlwind of energy, and the many of us who've been swept up in her wake as she charges up Main Street on any given day know the call to service she models for and demands from us.

Georgia trained initially at App State with a firm plan in mind to become a teacher, choosing PE when she figured out that English teachers had to wear dresses to school every day. After graduation she decamped to Rock Hill, teaching first in a Catholic school, then moving to a high poverty public school with a stint somewhere in there in Montessori. In Georgia's words she left the classroom because "I didn't get to make enough decisions."

Imagine that.

Here's where our story gets its legs. A theme begins to emerge—and it's not about being bossy, though those of us who love her know she can be. Rather, it's about Georgia's ability to see connection and sense opportunity in places the rest of us don't often look because she has so expansive a view of what those opportunities carry with them. That she brought the whole dog and pony show here to Davidson is our great fortune.

It might not have been so. Georgia has her Daddy's wanderlust . . . It once even managed to pull her away from us—for about 14 months, now nearly 20 years ago. Thank goodness she and Scott found their way back here and felt the pull of home when they drove back into Town.

Georgia, we are ever grateful for your energy, for your keen eye for the good that can come from drawing people together in partnership, and for your devotion to your

adopted hometown. It's just one more thing we Davidsonians get to hold over Chapel Hill! Your grateful town salutes you!

Now, we mentioned that we have two honorees to celebrate today and in doing so we finally put to rest the long pall COVID cast over the logistics of this annual celebration, though never over its spirit!

Karen Toney is our 2022 Burney honoree.

Karen grew up in Cross Lanes, West Virginia. She participated in youth group, CROP walks, and the high school band. It was there she learned foundational leadership, carrying it with her into her adult life. Karen believes that no one person is more important on a team than another. She lifts people up, from high schoolers who learn about food service to seniors who meet in the store.

Karen arrived in Mooresville in 1993 to work for Mooresville Animal Hospital, armed with her degree from Fairmont State College in veterinary technology. She always loved animals, even volunteering for a time at the Riverbanks Zoo. In Mooresville, she lived with her great aunt and uncle, and it was only shortly after her move that she was discovered by Phyllis Schultz of Ben and Jerry's, who asked Karen to work at her new ice cream store in Davidson. It was the beginning of a beautiful relationship with Phyllis and with our town over the past 30 years.

Karen wants people to come together with a sense of community and belonging. She has mentored hundreds of youth through employment opportunities, teaching them responsibility, conflict resolution, resilience, and other important life skills.

Karen also created events for the town, beginning with Concerts on the Green, which she conceived with the Village Store's Megan Blackwell. Next came being president of the newly formed Merchants Association, bringing organization and new ideas to our downtown. At Ben and Jerry's, she is responsible for the over 2000 pints of blood

collected at her quarterly blood drives. Last year, she created the Merry Main Street tricycle race during Christmas in Davidson for teams of businesses, with proceeds going to nonprofits. Another nonprofit that Karen supports in the store and online is The ODD sock, which provides socks for the homeless and is the recipient of her honorarium. Caring for others is a guiding light for Karen, and she believes that it has not only to do with her upbringing but also with her relationship with and devotion to her church.

Karen's Summer Camps bring 16 lucky kids, ages 6 to 14, for a fun and unique week of their summer. Local businesses give campers "a day in the life of" experiences that teach them everything from how the post office works, how the judicial system operates (through a participatory mock trial), to important lessons about personal finances and banking.

Bringing her love of dogs to her community work, Karen supports Continuing the Mission, giving doggie desserts to celebrate graduate support dogs when they receive veteran partners. Karen embodies Jerry's philosophy that "a business has a responsibility to give back to the community that supports them."

As someone observed, "Karen is a seemingly limitless source of care, love, and good in our community." Karen, for loving us and creating community in hundreds of ways, we salute you.

To these three wonderful women, we say thank-you. Davidson would not be Davidson without you. We love you.