

## Harley B. Gaston, Jr. Public Service Award

- Larry Capps –

Sponsored by: Creative Solutions Special Events

Presented by: Brad Thomas



Public service was etched into the DNA of Larry Capps long before he retired after a company record 53 years of service with PSNC Energy.

And long before the North Carolina Wildlife Federation named him its state-wide Wildlife Volunteer of the Year for 2019, citing his lifetime of work to preserve wildlife habitats, promote conservation, teach hunter safety and get youth and adults involved in the outdoors.

Larry works tirelessly as a volunteer photographer for the Montcross Area Chamber and other area non-profit organizations. He also volunteers in many capacities for Queen of Apostles church in Belmont.

Because of Larry's life-long devotion to helping others and serving his community ...

- A local volunteer fire department helps save lives and protect property;
- Hundreds of acres of wildlife habitats have been preserved throughout Gaston and surrounding counties;
- Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young people, have learned the importance of protecting the environment for birds and other animals;
- Families in need of food have access to wild game that otherwise might be wasted;
- At least one church and several community organizations, including the Montcross Area Chamber, would be hard pressed to hire the employees required to provide essential services that Larry provides as a volunteer.

Larry has served for decades on the Board of Directors for the Union Road Volunteer Fire Department, which was formed in 1956, and has been president of the Board for the past 12 years.

Larry is passionate about being a good steward of the environment and about protecting wildlife habitats.

About 14 years ago, Larry and his friend the late Dr. Bill Jarman founded an organization here called Gaston County PAWS (Piedmont Area Wildlife Stewards), which is affiliated with the North Carolina Wildlife Federation.

The mission of PAWS is to pursue the conservation, preservation, and protection of our wildlife and their habitat and related activities; and to raise awareness and educate the public about these endeavors.

Under the leadership of Larry Capps and Dr. Jarman, NC Wildlife Federation named Gaston County PAWS its Chapter of the Year in 2011 and again in 2015. In 2019, the NC Wildlife Federation honored the local PAWS chapter for bringing in the most new members.

PAWS, with Larry Capps leading the way, works with businesses and organizations throughout the region to protect wildlife habitats, to provide educational programs on best practices to prevent erosion, to improve hunter safety, and more.

Larry organizes several annual projects for PAWS including a Youth Day, gun safety classes, and a Wildlife Benefit Banquet and Silent Auction that raises tens of thousands of dollars to further the organization's goals.

He recently worked with Eagle Scouts at First Methodist Church in Gastonia to help them build bird houses and place them on the campus of Holy Angels in Belmont.

Another project involves working to control the rapidly growing deer population and to develop ways to get an over-supply of venison to people in need of food. PAWS partners with N.C. Hunters for the Hungry to develop deer donation sites, where meat is processed and made available to those in need.

Larry was instrumental in developing this program here, which provides thousands of pounds of venison to hungry families each season. Last year, eight crisis assistance agencies in Gaston County were able to provide more than 8,000 meals because of PAWS participation in the Hunters for the Hungry program here.

Anyone who spends more than 30 seconds in the presence of Larry Capps will hear about PAWS and the work he does to build and install osprey nests, wild duck boxes and bluebird houses. He's always on the lookout for any business or organization with land where PAWS can improve the habitat for wildlife. And he's a world-class recruiter of anyone with an interest in wildlife to become a supporter of PAWS.

Larry volunteers in multiple capacities at his church – Queen of Apostles in Belmont. And he is one of the most dedicated volunteers for the Montcross Area Chamber of Commerce. He photographs free of charge most of the 85 to 100 annual events at the Chamber, which include ribbon cuttings, ground-breakings, Network After Work receptions, Business Buzz breakfasts, the annual celebration banquet, the golf tournament, the MACC Fiesta Cinco de Mayo event, Get Ready Gaston, the Christmas parade and many others.

Larry is the father of four grown daughters and husband of Judy Capps, who also is a regular participant and volunteer at Chamber events.

Larry Capps is a most worthy recipient of the Harley B. Gaston, Jr. Public Service Award for 2019, which is named to honor the memory of the long-time Gaston County attorney and judge, who helped found the Montcross Area Chamber.

**HARLEY B. GASTON, JR. PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD:** *An individual, who may or may not be a member of the Montcross Area Chamber, who has made an outstanding contribution to the community through involvement, service, or leadership to improve the quality of life for citizens of the Montcross Area (including the communities of Belmont, Cramerton, Lowell, McAdenville, Mount Holly and Stanley) in eastern Gaston County.*



Larry Capps presiding at the annual Wildlife Benefit Banquet and Silent Auction he spearheads to raise tens of thousands of dollars, which Piedmont Area Wildlife Stewards (PAWS) uses to preserve wildlife habitats.



Larry Capps (right) with PAWS representatives John and Allison Cottingham presenting a donation check to Holy Angels of Belmont to be used for an outdoor garden on the campus where Holy Angels serves residents of all ages with intellectual developmental disabilities and delicate medical conditions.