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Former Mayor Daryl Busch Honored

Former Perris Mayor Daryl Busch was named Citizen of the Year during a gala dinner and awards ceremony held May 4 at the Bob Glass Gymnasium.

Current Mayor Michael Vargas presented Busch with the Citizens of the Year Award, which was renamed the Alberta Mable Kearney Award to honor a Perris icon, civil-rights pioneer and the founder of the Dora Nelson African American Art & History Museum.

The Kearney Award was the highlight of a ceremony honoring volunteers and employees from 13 agencies with ties to the City of Perris.

"It's great that we honor those people who make a difference in our community," Vargas said. "Mayor Busch did a lot of good things for the City. It's always nice to give and get a kudo."

Vargas read a proclamation that lauded Busch, who served as the elected Mayor from 1999-2016 for his "professionalism, his dedication, and his many selfless contributions and commitment to the citizens of the City of Perris."

Those include:

- His dedication to improve public safety, attract new jobs, major businesses and affordable homes for first time home buyers
- Championing major infrastructure improvements like the widening of Interstate 215 and construction of new freeway interchanges at Ramona Expressway and Fourth Street
- Advocating for the City of Perris while serving on several regional boards including Vice Chair of the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (Metrolink), which resulted in train service to Perris in 2015
- Playing leading roles in local and regional committees, such as the March Joint Powers Authority and the Riverside County Transportation Commission and serving as liaison to the Beautification Committee of the City of Perris



Former Perris Mayor Daryl Busch (left) accepts the Alberta Mable Kearney Citizen of the Year Award from Mayor Michael Vargas during a ceremony May 4 at the Bob Glass Gymnasium.

Busch, a native of Illinois, served in the U.S. Navy as a shipboard radar operator. He later moved to Perris, where he earned a degree in business and operated a successful restaurant. His tenure as an elected official is one of the longest in the 106-year history of Perris.

In remarks made after accepting the Kearney award, Busch thanked his wife, Kay, and daughter-in-law, Charlene Busch, both in the audience. He said his motivation while serving as mayor stemmed from a simple premise.

"I wanted to do everything I could to help the City of Perris, and I think I did a pretty good job," he said.

Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers, a colleague of Busch for 17 years, said the former mayor's greatest accomplishment was bringing Metrolink service to Perris, a commitment that took 10 years to complete. The Metrolink station in the City, Rogers said, "put Perris on the map."

"His legacy will long be remembered in the City of Perris," Rogers said. "His time in office is an example of inspirational and outstanding leadership."



Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers stands with Citizen of the Year and former Mayor Daryl Busch, Mayor Michael Vargas and City Councilman Malcolm Corona at the Perris Honors Gala May 4 at the Bob Glass Gymnasium.

Honoring Mrs. Kearney

Busch becomes the first recipient of the renamed Citizen of the Year Award, now known as the Alberta Mable Kearney Award. Kearney was born in 1920 and worked as a migrant laborer, picking cotton and other crops. She and her husband, Charles Kearney, moved to the Perris Valley in 1957.

A tragic mistake led Kearney to conceive and bring to reality the Dora Nelson African-American Art and History Museum at 316 East Seventh Street. Kearney bought the property and demolished the dilapidated building on the site without realizing it once housed the First Baptist Church, the City's first African-American congregation started by Nelson in 1924.

The former slave, born in Georgia, had moved to Perris after living in Indiana. Nelson died several years after starting the congregation and little else is known about her life. The loss of the historic building ignited a passion in Kearney to begin collecting artifacts documenting the African-American experience, both locally and nationally. Among the artifacts were Victorian screen doors from the original First Baptist Church, a dresser and steamer trunk owned by Nelson, copies of slave documents including an auction notice from 1833 and a collection of shoes from people who worked to improve race relations.

Alberta Mable Kearney died in August 2016 at age 95. Weeks later, the City renamed its Citizen of the Year Award in her memory.

Other non-profit organizations and agencies presenting awards at the May 4 Perris Honors Gala included:

- The Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce: Lewis and Carter families, Good Neighbor Award
- Val Verde Unified School District: Rae Dunn and Jennifer Daskocil, Employees of the Year
- American Legion: Mike Weir, Legionnaire of the Year
- Perris Elementary School District: Staci Cohenour, Teacher of the Year
- EXCEED (agencies work with disabled adults): Alice Luera, Outstanding Service Award
- Friends of the Library: Chineze Ndukwe, Volunteer of the Year
- Nuview Union School District: Sheryl Urzedowski, Employee of the Year
- Perris Valley Historical & Museum Association: Katie Keyes, Volunteer of the Year
- Riverside County Sheriff's Department: Deputy Mike Heuer, Sworn Officer of the Year
- Perris Union High School District: Lori Ortell, Confidential Employee of the Year; Gary Miller, Teacher of the Year; Nick Hilton, Principal of the Year; Kathleen Reid, Counselor of the Year; Kerry Bobbitt, Classified Manager of the Year and Leslie Machado, Teacher of the Year
- Perris Valley Women's Club: Betty Kay, Volunteer of the Year
- Rotary Club of Perris: Mike Behrens, Rotarian of the Year

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