

Governors past and present honor Salem's Dick Withnell

By Saerom Yoo

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Oregon's governors have selected Salem auto dealer Dick Withnell as the recipient of this year's Al and Pat Reser Civic Leadership Award, and all he can do is spout off names of others worthy of the honor.

"It's really humbling because there's so many people doing a lot of great things," he said. "I could name 20 people right off the bat.

"It's a surprise."

The Civic Leadership Award is part of the Governors' Gold Awards, started eight years ago by former Gov. Ted Kulongoski and Special Olympics Oregon.

The aim of the annual event, which benefits Special Olympics Oregon, is to highlight greatness and innovation in the state, said Margaret Hunt, CEO of the nonprofit.

With the Civic Leadership Award specifically, Hunt said, the panel of former and current Oregon governors look for people "who have made a big difference in their community."

"And that is profoundly true with Dick Withnell," she added.

Hunt said Withnell has been generous with his time, resources and talents.

"Another thing about Dick Withnell is that he's been able always to work with other community leaders to get things done," she said.

Withnell, who sold his auto business to his son nine years ago, has since been a crusader for the community's foster youth, fight against methamphetamines, and establishment of the



Kobbi R. Blair / Statesman Journal
Dick Withnell (center) prepares to be interviewed Aug. 11 about being chosen to receive the Al and Pat Reser Civic Leadership Award at the eighth annual Governors' Gold Awards this fall. Sharon "Shay" Knorr (left) and Dale Turnbull prepare the room with lighting and a camera.

2011 Governors' Gold Awards Recipients

Ken and Joan Austin

Wieden + Kennedy

Precision Castparts Corp.

The Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association

Jean M. Auel, Special Achievement Award

Dick Withnell, the Al and Pat Reser Civic Leadership Award

Hosts of the Awards

Gov. John Kitzhaber

Gov. Ted Kulongoski

Gov. Barbara Roberts

Kroc Center, among other causes.

But his job is far from being done.

"Things aren't all well," he said. "There's a huge need for leadership and sweat equity."

Withnell and other Governors' Gold Award recipients will be presented with their award at a dinner in October.

Gerry Frank, who has collaborated with Withnell in various community projects, said Withnell's service is a good example for Salem's business community.

"I can't imagine anybody that deserves it more," he said.

Frank, who is on the board of directors of Special Olympics Oregon, has known Withnell well for 15 years.

In Withnell's mind, it is simply his turn to serve.

Those who were in his shoes before him stay with him — quite literally, in his wallet — to serve as a constant reminder and inspiration.

They were the people — like Frank Wedel, Wallace Bonesteele Jr. and Rollin Haag — he said, who allowed him to focus on his business while they were taking care of the community.

"They gave a witness to how a person should be after they're successful," he said. "Now it's my turn."

And his passion is about seeing that everyone has an opportunity to succeed.

"Why can't every single person who is able-bodied and wants to work have a job?" he said. "And why can't every kid who wants to be successful go to college?"

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Gov. Victor Atiyeh

Dinner Event

5 p.m. Oct. 11

Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE MLK Blvd., Portland

Tickets: \$200, table sponsorships available

For information, contact Cathy Gidley at (503) 248-0600 ext. 45 or cgidley@soor.org.