



Leatherman receives leadership award

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By Gina Vasselli

South Carolina Sen. Hugh Leatherman, who represents Darlington and Florence counties in District 31, was honored for his leadership Monday night at the Wilkins Award dinner.

The third annual awards dinner, sponsored by the Riley Institute at Furman University, honors a state legislator who shows legislative leadership.

The Wilkins award is given annually to a state legislator who “embodies the highest principles of leadership based on integrity, compassion, vision, civility and courage.” The winner is selected by a committee of business and community leaders, former legislators, political scientists and members of the South Carolina media.

The two previous winners are Sen. John Drummond and Speaker of the House Bobby Harrell.

“The selection committee chose Sen. Leatherman because he reflects the kind of quiet, thoughtful and courageous leadership that focuses on the needs of the people of South Carolina,” Don Gordon, the executive director of the Riley Institute, said in a press release.

The Riley Institute at Furman is a non-partisan program affiliated with the university’s Department of Political Science. The institute created the David H. Wilkins Legislative Leadership Program in 2006.

David Wilkins, the former Speaker of the South Carolina House of Representatives and current U.S. Ambassador to Canada, said that although he had no part in selecting Leatherman for the award, he was pleased with the decision.

“On my worst days with Hugh Leatherman, he was a worthy adversary and somebody that drove me nuts. On my best days, he was a dear friend,” Wilkins said.

Leatherman said he was proud to be selected for the award, especially because of the previous recipients: John Drummond, President Pro-Tem Emeritus of the Senate, and Bobby Harrell, the Speaker of the House.

“Being in that company is very humbling, and I’m very honored,” Leatherman said.

Leatherman, a Republican, was elected to the South Carolina Senate in November 1980. He serves as chairman of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, while also serving on the Senate Ethics, Interstate Cooperation, Labor, Commerce and Industry, Rules, State House and Transportation committees. He also serves as one of five members on the State Budget and Control Board, which oversees the state’s financial dealings on a monthly basis. A native of Lincoln County, N.C., Leatherman moved to Florence shortly after graduating from North Carolina State University. He began his career in public service in 1967 when he was elected to Quinby Town Council. He later served Quinby as mayor pro tempore (1971-76). He still operates several businesses in the Pee Dee, including his home-building construction company, LEACON.

Leatherman has received honorary doctorate degrees from Francis Marion University, the College of Charleston, the Medical University of South Carolina, The Citadel, Coastal Carolina University, the University of South Carolina, Clemson University and Lander University. The science building at Frances Marion is named in his honor and an endowed faculty chair at the university also bears his name. Florence-Darlington Technical College recently named a building on its new Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology campus in his honor.

He is married to Jean Leatherman and has six children and three grandchildren.

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