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Urban League honors Ehrmann

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Calder D. Ehrmann's middle name could be diversity.

That's what emerged when the Michelin retiree was given the Urban League of the Upstate's top honor, the Whitney M. Young Jr. Humanitarian Award, on Thursday night at the Hyatt Regency Greenville. He is the 28th recipient of the award.

When he was introduced to attendees, Ehrmann was described as "having a passion for diversity."

Others during the evening said he contributed to racial harmony not just in the Upstate, but in other cities statewide. Former Gov. Richard Riley said in about a 12-minute video tribute: "He's a humanitarian and he deserves this award."

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Stewart Spinks of the Spinx Co. said Ehrmann was his "foxhole buddy" back in the day when there were skirmishes about issues like diversity.

"We (did) it because it was the right thing to do," he said.

The award is named in honor of Whitney M. Young, who was head of the National Urban League when he accidentally drowned in Nigeria in 1970 at age 49. Young trained in electrical engineering at MIT.

Ehrmann, arriving in Greenville in 1970, was on the ground floor at Michelin North America when senior management decided that diversity was good for the company and for the Upstate.

Retiring after a 30-year career, Ehrmann is currently a senior associate at the Riley Institute at Furman University. He plays a key role in the institute's Diversity Leadership Academy, which has trained an estimated 325 CEOs, managers and other policymakers.

The DLA training helps senior and middle-level managers understand the range of new faces, ethnic group and cultures that have entered the modern workplace.

More than 50 people who have gone through the DLA attended the "One of Our Own" ceremony.

Ehrmann said he was humbled to be a recipient of the award. He took little credit for the diversity gains in the Upstate, instead saluting such people as Jim Micali of Michelin; Michael Riordan, the new CEO at Greenville Hospital System; David Shi of Furman; Juan Johnson of the Riley Institute; and the Urban League.

He also encouraged businesses that haven't embraced diversity to do so.

"I'd like everybody to get into the game," he said.

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