



Media Advisory

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Collierville's Lewellen receives Manager of the Year Award

NASHVILLE, Tenn. --- In honor of his outstanding performance during his 19 years of public service as Collierville's Town Administrator, James Lewellen was named Manager of the Year by the Tennessee City Management Association (TCMA). Lewellen was presented the award Tuesday, June 24, 2014, at the 75th Annual Conference of the Tennessee Municipal League (TML) held at the Chattanooga Convention Center.

The award is presented by TCMA each year to acknowledge Tennessee managers, administrators, or assistants who have made exceptional contributions to their profession.

In municipal government, some people are born leaders, extraordinary visionaries with the innate ability to solve complex problems, tackle large scale projects and guide people toward a common goal. Communities, under the care of these certain individuals, thrive and flourish like a well-tended garden and people's lives are enriched just by having known them.

In Collierville, that person is Town Administrator James Lewellen. Since his arrival in 1995, Lewellen has served under three mayors, and witnessed his town's population soar from 18,000 to 46,000. Today's general fund is \$47.8 million, and the town's workforce has grown from 226 to 463 full-time employees.

While these circumstances are exciting for communities, managing all of this growth requires a strategic process. Lewellen set about developing Collierville's first ever Comprehensive Land Use Plan. This approach has been a road map that has helped the town transform from a developing rural community to a cosmopolitan suburb. In the years since, the community has relied on this strategic approach, and unveiled its most recent strategic plan *Collierville 2040: A Vision for Your Hometown* in 2012.

The community is also emerging as a regional center for commerce and innovation. With Lewellen on board as town administrator, Fed Ex World Tech came to town along with 3,000

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employees. Baptist Memorial Hospital is also a vital part of the community, with a staff of 409, along with a shopping mall and two signature golf courses.

With this remarkable surge in economic and residential development has come diversity, not only in terms of race and nationality, but also of background and opinion. But Lewellen has proven himself a master of balancing community desires with budgetary reality. With compromise and patience, he helped steer the Board of Mayor and Aldermen through the town's growing pains, and emerged with a consensus on the direction and focus the town would follow in utilizing its resources to meet the community's needs. Working as a team, a long range plan was executed to ensure that the community's facilities, infrastructure and amenities would meet the increasing demands and rising expectations of the changing demographic profile.

"James is clearly a role model within the city management profession," said Collierville Mayor Stan Joyner. "He is deeply committed to maintaining the highest standards of ethics, impartiality and professionalism. He always does the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons."

During Lewellen's tenure, the town received a AAA bond rating from Moody's Investor Service and won the distinguished Budget Award for 17 consecutive years from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States.

Along with a new Emergency Dispatch Center, three new fire stations and a fire administration and training building were constructed and the fire department improved its ISO rating from a 4 from 1995 to its current score of 3. This lower rating, which helps establish fire insurance premiums for residential and commercial properties, translates over to cheaper insurance rates for Collierville's residents.

The community has successfully fostered historic preservation projects both creatively and constructively. The 1890-era Collierville Christian Church was transformed into a top-notch museum, The Morton Museum of Collierville History. And the hallowed halls are bustling again at the town's old High School. This 1935-era structure was repurposed into 30,000 square feet of administrative office space to be used by the new Collierville school system.

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Thanks to Lewellen, residents are walking, running and biking an additional 15.5 miles of greenbelt trails in Collierville and the community parks have doubled in acreage. The Peterson Lake Nature Center and Boardwalk are among the town's most prized recreational amenities along with two spray parks.

Recently, Collierville received the honor of being ranked No. 1 for best and most affordable places for young families to live in Tennessee by the San Francisco-based website, *NerdWallet*.

"James Lewellen has consistently delivered for many years both incredible leadership and value to the citizens of Collierville as town administrator. He is among the very best in Tennessee," said David Lillard, Tennessee State Treasurer.

As years passed, the future of public education emerged as a vital issue in Collierville. No new municipal school districts had been created in Tennessee since the 1950's. And Lewellen was at the center of the town's multi-year effort to start a school system in Collierville. He played a key role in organizing a team of consultants and legal counsel, assisting state leaders with the coordination of legislative efforts, and leading Town Hall meetings.

"As his Mayor, I find that perhaps no single enterprise demonstrates James' mastery of his profession better than his recent involvement in the creation of Collierville's Municipal Schools," Joyner notes. "It is difficult to overstate the complexity of this challenge."

The community elected its first school board in November of 2013. And In August 2014, the newly formed Collierville Municipal School System will hold its first classes.

In 2014, Lewellen was presented the coveted Dunavant Public Service Award, from the Rotary Club of Memphis East. This award recognizes annually the most outstanding governmental leader in Shelby County. He is also a past recipient of the H.E. Harrell Education Award, 2013, from the Collierville Chamber of Commerce, the H.R. Houston Community Service Award 2007, from Leadership Collierville and served as past President of the Tennessee City Management Association 2011-12.

"James certainly deserves to be recognized by the Tennessee City Management Association as City Manager of the Year," agrees Mark Brown, Bartlett's chief administrative

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officer. "He is a dynamic and creative professional who has helped Collierville grow and provide quality cost effective services for the town's citizens. As a colleague, he is always available to listen and provide a great perspective on issues we face in Shelby County. He is a great city manager, a humble public servant, and someone I admire and am glad to call a friend."

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The Tennessee City Management Association is a professional association of appointed city Managers and administrators and assistants that focuses on providing continuing education, technical assistance, training, and information resources to its 120 members. Managers are appointed by their elected boards to oversee the day-to-day operations of their cities or towns. Professional administrators work in partnership with their elected boards to create excellence in local governance.