

Local

RWRA and GRADD receive Spirit of Kentucky Award

✍ By Jacob Mulliken Messenger-Inquirer

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Daviess Fiscal Court, Regional Water Resource Agency and Green River Area Development District received the Spirit of Kentucky Award at the annual Governor's Local Issues Conference on Friday for their collective work on the Cedar Hills and Friendly Park sewer projects.

The Spirit of Kentucky Award is awarded annually through the Kentucky Department of Local Government to the sponsors of a successful project that is a result of multiple government agencies working together in a cost-effective manner in various criteria. Those include the utilization of innovative and/or multiple funding sources; successful regional impact during the most recent 12-month period; and innovative or resourceful cooperation of two or more jurisdictions of government or authority.

The conference, which took place in Louisville, is an opportunity for local and state officials to come together so that local officials can voice concerns as well as highlight what steps are being taken on the local level to address issues, said Daviess County Judge-Executive Al Mattingly.

The award was presented by Gov. Matt Bevin. In attendance to receive the award with Mattingly were Daviess County Commissioner Charlie Castlen, state Rep. Suzanne Miles, RWRA Executive Director Joe Schepers, RWRA Director of Engineering Dean Behnke, incoming RWRA Director of Engineering Sean O'Bryan, GRADD Executive Director Jiten Shah and GRADD Associate Director of Community and Economic Development Joanna Shake.

"The award gives us satisfaction that as elected officials that we have a job to do and by the estimation of the state government, we have done it," Mattingly said. "It truly was a cooperative effort between the citizens, state and local governments to get this project rolling. Not to mention GRADD and Joanna Shake, they were instrumental in maintaining those relationships. It took a lot of people and a lot of sleepless nights until everything was secured."

While the award did not come with a monetary reward, the goal of all of the agencies involved doesn't boil down to awards or honors, Schepers said.

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"That isn't why we are in this," he said. "However, it is nice to see that everyone's hard work is being recognized. In our agency, there was a lot of overtime work we had two guys that were out there every day to operate that plant and maintain it. We have taken a plant beyond repair and have twined, duct-taped and pieced together those plants so they are up and running. It is anticipated that we will be well under budget by the end of the projects. Any money under budget gets rolled into the construction to help reduce the monthly cost that is passed on to the citizens of those areas."

The Cedar Hills saga began when RWRA was granted receivership by a Franklin Circuit Court in September 2016 of the treatment facilities.

At that time, state Rep. Scott Lewis, an Ohio County resident, was the owner and operator of the package plants in Friendly Park and Cedar Hills. He filed to abandon them, declaring that he could no longer financially support them. RWRA had to plan two quickly-paced sewer extensions to those areas so residents wouldn't be forced to leave their homes in the event of failures at their respective plants.

The process from acquisition to the beginnings of the projects have truly been a group effort between all levels of government and will hopefully provide a model for other areas around the state looking for solutions to the same problem, Miles said.

"As far as that conference, that is the most prestigious award to receive," she said. "The most important part of the award was the governor and the commissioner of the Department of Local Government recognizing the importance of so many of us coming together for a solution. Hopefully, this will be a model going forward because these issues exist throughout the state.

"I think that it helps with the notoriety that we all worked toward solutions with issues that may not have seemed to have a solution on the surface. For me, this is a project that singles out a small group of people that were able to make the tough decisions and go to work. It is one of those situations where everyone is important and everyone counts. The recognition of working effectively with others and succeeding far outweighs the award."

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