



## **2006 - 2007 Award Winners**

### **The Individual Recycler of the Year** *Nancy Underwood*

Mrs. Nancy Underwood does not deserve to be recognized as Recycler of the Year. She deserves to be recognized as Recycler of a Lifetime.

A rare soul in today's society, Nancy is a woman of conviction, a woman of values, and a woman who confidently speaks and works for those things and causes, which she deems valuable. In her eighty-five years of life Nancy has highly valued the act of recycling, and in placing such esteem upon this behavior, which has such great economic and environmental benefits, Nancy has been one of Coffee County's most valuable citizens!

When Nancy joined the Keep Coffee County Beautiful (KCCB) board of directors in 1992, she appointed herself to the recycling committee and began to establish what would quickly become notable and effective recycling programs within the community. She instituted an annual recycling contest in each of the county's elementary schools. She helped to institute a program at a local junior high called "Trashinators" that was later adopted/immulated by neighbor junior high schools. Nancy grew to be in charge of assuring that the annual county fair was a "Litter Free Fair." She recruited area high school students to collect litter during the week of the fair and supervised the placement of recycling receptacles on the fairgrounds. Most noteworthy, however, is Nancy's work at the Coffee County Recycling Center.

Nancy has always led by example, and this characteristic became most apparent during the time when she was the "queen bee" of the Coffee County Recycling Center—where she became a common fixture and friend to all recyclers. Nancy would stand guard at the gate each time the center was open and despite the weather conditions, supervising all recyclers and bluntly giving instruction and/or correction. She was allergic to bees and had lots of allergies, but if she suspected someone of having brought a bottle or can that had not been rinsed, she would climb up on her step stool with rake in hand and dig in the dumpster until she found the contaminated item. She also appointed herself "inspector" of the recyclables. If she found any contaminated items before they were placed in the dumpster, she would load them in her trunk, take them home to wash them, and then bring them back the next time the Recycling Center was open. One KCCB board member commented with amusement, "She worked her butt off—and she was in her seventies!"

At each of the KCCB board meetings, Nancy would bring handouts displaying that month's results at the Recycling Center and at the school's recycling contests. She viewed her place on the recycling committee as a very serious one. She was intent upon making a difference in Coffee County's mindset toward recycling, and in a day when it's so common for one to become overstretched and overcommitted, she is to be commended.

A retired math teacher, Nancy was always eager to give recycling facts, figures, and statistics to anyone who would listen. Because of her background, she understood the value of education and would often pay her own way to Keep Tennessee Beautiful and Tennessee Recycling Coalition conferences in order to self-educate and thus have more knowledge to share with others in hopes of persuading them of the necessity of recycling.

Because of declining health, Mrs. Underwood and her husband are in the process of relocating to an assisted living facility. Her involvement with KCCB has recently ceased, and her absence has left a void impossible to ignore! I have checked-in on her a few times in the past months to let her know that we are thinking of and missing her. Each time she has taken the opportunity to confront me with questions like "Who's working with the kids in the schools?" and "Are you in the science classes teaching about recycling?" Filled with desire to love and protect the natural resources of this land, she wants and expects others to step-up and adopt the recycling way-of-life that she displayed for us all.

In anticipation of her relocation, Nancy returned to me some literature and materials that she faithfully distributed during each of her years of service on the KCCB board of directors. I walked her to her car as she was leaving my office, and the parking lot happened to be particularly littered that day. Disregarding our conversation, she didn't hesitate to stoop for almost ten minutes to pick up the litter in her path. When finally finished, she handed me her arm-full of garbage and said, "You won't mind to throw that away for me." A bit baffled—I must admit—I agreed to do so, and I wished her well as I began to walk away. She hollered back at me before she closed her car door, though—"Be sure you recycle that Pepsi can. It doesn't belong in the garbage!"



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*Working together to promote reuse and recycling activities in Tennessee.*