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NEWS

Meet Henry C. Perret Jr., Civic Cup winner

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Henry C. Perret Jr.'s penchant for serving his community found roots in the tightly knit neighborhood on Montrose Avenue where he grew up.

There he was one of 28 children in five nearby houses who were reared, he said, by five sets of dedicated parents. Perret himself was the second of 10 children in his family, at times assigned by his order of birth in the family to take care of his siblings. Part of his boyhood duties at home, he said, was boiling eight cups of rice every day.

As as he awaited the start of the Annual Civic Cup Award dinner on Tuesday night at the Petroleum Club — he was the 83rd recipient — he recalled a Lafayette that was small enough that he rode his tricycle on Johnston Street, a community of neighborhoods and a place where a boy could make abundant friends. His role models, he said, were his own parents "who gave up everything for us."

The local attorney was chosen for his hand in starting or helping to start a host of community agencies and institutions, among them Miles Perret Cancer Services, named for his son, who died of a brain tumor at age 8. In the 15 years since it was formed, he said, Miles Perret Cancer Services has helped with free services 12,000 families dealing with cancer, 3,000 in the past year alone.

Perret had a hand, too, in creating the Community Foundation of Acadiana, the Games of Acadiana, and Crossroads Catholic Bookstore.

He holds Miles Perret Cancer Services closest to his heart, he said, because it is named for his son and because of the outpouring of generosity that people have shown toward it. His own vision for the organization was "very limited," he said, but "Miles Perret has become more than we ever imagined."

In accepting the award, Perret cited B.I. Moody and Paul Hilliard as two community leaders who have influenced him greatly over the years, Moody for boundless generosity toward people who needed help during tough economic times and Hilliard for serving as "a surrogate father" to many young community leaders.

He said he counted himself blessed for growing up in Lafayette, for attending Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School — 25 of the 28 neighborhood children attended there — during a time when the church and school were served by extraordinary priests and sisters. He counted himself lucky, too, for attending the University of Southwestern Louisiana during a golden age for basketball.

"Lafayette is more than a home, neighborhood, school or university," he said. "It is the happiest place in America."

Two ingredients make it so, he said: "serving those in need and just being grateful."

The Civic Cup award is given annually to an outstanding individual who has made significant contributions to the community. Recipients are chosen by a committee of past recipients. Community members and the public submit letters recommending a worthy individual.

Bill Fenstermaker, who chaired this year's selection committee, said Perret was chosen from a host of good nominees.

"He is a tremendous champion of Lafayette," Fenstermaker said.

The award was presented by Kevin Moody.

Perret, a founding partner of the Perret Doise Law Firm, sits on the boards of the Louisiana State Board of Ethics, Our Lady of Lourdes Regional Medical Center, the Ascension Day School Board of Trustees and Our Lady of Fatima School Board.

He has been married for 37 years to Debra Tucker Perret; the two started the Miles Perret Center. The couple has five sons.

