

Red Lerille named Civic Cup winner

Regarded as giving,
humble role model

By Kris Wartelle

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The man known for keeping Lafayette healthy for more than 50 years has been chosen to receive one of Lafayette's highest awards. Long time health club owner and businessman Red Lerille has been named this year's Civic Cup award winner.



Red Lerille

For the past 80 years, the Lafayette Civic Cup has been awarded to one outstanding individual in the city who has made significant contributions to the community. The Civic Cup committee is made up of past winners and every year they choose the next recipient.

This year's honoree, the owner of Red Lerille's Health and Racquet Club, is probably one of the most recognizable faces in Lafayette.

Most people know Lerille

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Civic Cup

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and how he built his one-room gym into the multi-million dollar club it is today. But what a lot of people don't know is how much Lerille has done behind the scenes for the community.

"My dad doesn't like to let people know he gives back," said his son, Mark Lerille. "Some things I don't even know about — what he sponsors, how much he gives to schools, churches, athletic events."

But those who have benefited from Lerille's generosity do know. There is probably not an athletic event that he hasn't supported or donated to in the past, and it doesn't stop there. Thousands of students at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette can thank Lerille for giving them their first job.

"The community is blessed to have someone like him," said committee member Madelyn Hilliard. "He has been such a positive example for the youth. Those who get jobs there (Red's) can see his example of work ethics and what hard work can do for you. He has done so much to help grow our community but he never wants it to be known. It's even hard to give him this award because he is a very humble person. He doesn't want all the recognition."

That humbleness is still evident today. Lerille was not only surprised by the news that he had been awarded the Civic Cup, but said he can't understand why.

"I don't have a clue," Lerille said. "They just called me up and told me I was selected. It's an honor but I don't know why. All I do is operate a little mom-and-pop store."

Lerille's "mom and pop" store is a membership only, sprawling health and fitness club that offers everything from weight training to cycling classes. The facility, located on Doucet Road, resembles a country club in many ways. There are more than 23 tennis courts, four swimming pools, racquetball courts, saunas and steam rooms, an outdoor running track and just about every kind of fitness machine known to man.

Lerille has been in the business of keeping Acadiana residents fit and healthy since 1963 when he started his first gym on Johnston Street. It was



Red Lerille assists members at Red's Health & Racquet Club in Lafayette Sept. 18. PAUL KIEU, THE ADVERTISER

shortly after he won the title of Mr. America, a bodybuilding competition, in 1960. In fact, he celebrated the 50th anniversary of being in business earlier this year.

Lerille has been preaching the virtues of eating right, exercising and living a healthy lifestyle ever since. But if you ask him why he has been able to turn that into a successful business, dominating the market for some 50 years, his philosophy is surprisingly simple. Just ask his employees.

"Hello and goodbye," said Carla Andrus, a Red's employee for the past 38 years. "He always said those are the two most important words in the English language. All of our employees greet the members when they walk in and when they leave. He knows how to deal with people."

For Lerille, it is all about making the members happy.

Family and friends say he also believes in setting goals and achieving them. Lerille adds a new project every year to improve the club. Over time, he has added on and built it into a 195,000-square-foot facility that is considered by many to be one of the best health clubs in the country.

"He has that drive and determination," said Mark Lerille. "He is always setting goals and reaching them."

One key difference between Lerille and many other business owners is something most people notice immediately. Lerille spends every day and night working at Red's himself. He arrives before 3 a.m. to open up and work out, and aside from a

few breaks for lunch with his wife or to fly his antique airplanes, he doesn't leave until after 7 or 8 at night. He does just about every job in the place, including answering phones and signing up new members. And he does that seven days a week, every week of the year.

"How many people can say their boss goes to work at 2:30 in the morning, does all he does and see him here til late at night?" asked Andrus. "How many can say that?"

Lerille also donates generously to his church, Faith House, hospice and numerous other charities and causes that he will never tell you about. To him, operating a thriving business through thick and thin is all he ever wanted to be known for — that, and keeping people healthy.

"I haven't done anything great," Lerille said. "I just don't feel that deserving. But I'm very proud that people talk about how good a shape our members are in and what a great place this is to exercise. I would be a member here if I didn't own it."

CIVIC CUP

For the past 80 years, the Civic Cup Award has stood for the very best in the Lafayette Community. It was started in 1933 by the Young Men's Business Club. The first person to receive the award was local businessman and developer of the oil center, Maurice Heymann.

According to past recipients, the small group of business leaders got together to recognize and show appreciation to one outstanding individual in the city who had made significant contributions to the community. Each year, recipients are chosen by a committee of past recipients. Members of the community and the public submit letters recommending someone to the nominating committee and the past recipients. It is a low-key affair which is meant to be non-political and confidential.

The Daily Advertiser is the only media sponsor and by tradition makes the official announcement profiling the honoree in the first Sunday edition after the winner has been chosen.

MORE ONLINE

See a video of Red Lerille talking about his daily workout and his favorite causes at theadvertiser.com.



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