



PRESS RELEASE

October 3, 2017

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Three Texans earn statewide honors for their commitments to public school children

(AUSTIN, TX) -- Friends of Texas Public Schools will honor three Texans at its 13TH annual awards gala on December 6, 2017 at the Baylor Club, McLane Stadium in Waco.

TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS FRIEND OF THE YEAR

Pastor Charles Foster Johnson, Founder, Pastors for Texas Children

TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS AMBASSADOR OF THE YEAR

Virddie Montgomery, Principal, Wylie High School

FRIENDS OF TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDERS' DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Johnny Veselka, Executive Director, Texas Association of School Administrators

The **Friend of the Year Award** was established to honor those rare individuals and organizations who step up as champions for those who learn and work in our schools. Honorees clearly see beyond the sensational headlines and often negative politics and understand that the success of Texas public education is everyone's business. This year, there was no bigger champion than Pastor Charles Foster Johnson and his team at Pastors for Texas Children.

"Pastor Johnson has enthusiastically accepted the role of chief advocate for the public school children of Texas," said Scott Milder, Founder and CEO, Friends of Texas Public Schools. "He recognizes the state has been avoiding its constitutional obligation to properly support our public schools and has mobilized 1,000-plus pastors to send a very clear message to our elected legislators that this is unacceptable. May God bless Pastor Johnson."

The **Ambassador of the Year Award** was established by *Friends* to highlight the efforts of an inspiring educator stepping up as a champion for the public school children of Texas, someone whose work builds public confidence and admiration in the profession of public education. "I don't know that I have ever met an educator more deserving of this honor than Virddie Montgomery," said Leslie Milder, Founder, Friends of Texas Public Schools. "He is a remarkable example of the attributes we believe make an ideal educator, which are servant heart, warrior spirit, and fun-loving attitude." (*Full disclosure, we borrowed these descriptors from the Southwest Airlines playbook.*)

The **Founders' Distinguished Service Award** was created to highlight a lifetime's effort to strengthen the public schools of Texas. "Johnny Veselka is a household name within the family of educators across Texas," said Blake Cooper, Executive Director, Friends of Texas Public Schools. "No individual has had a more positive impact on raising honorable school leaders over the last 30 years than our friend Johnny."

Please continue reading for more information and career highlights on each of these honorees. For Gala ticket and sponsorship information, visit www.fotps.org/FOY17 or email jstorm@fotps.org.



Pastor Charles Foster Johnson, Founder
Pastors for Texas Children
2017 Friend of the Year

Charles Foster Johnson is a pastor and public education advocate; founder and co-pastor of Bread, a faith community in Fort Worth, Texas. Throughout his thirty-six-year pastoral ministry he has served churches in Mississippi, Kentucky and Texas, including Second Baptist Church of Lubbock where he led in a complete church relocation, and Trinity Baptist Church of San Antonio where he helped build a multi-cultural and multi-racial community of faith among the 6000-member congregation. He served a two-year term on the faculty of McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University, as Visiting Professor of Preaching.

In 2013, he founded Pastors for Texas Children, a statewide ecumenical organization mobilizing the faith community for public education ministry and advocacy. His child advocacy also includes service on the Board of Trustees of the Child Friendly Faith Project.

He is a frequent preacher and speaker in university, church, business, education, and non-profit circles. He has written for numerous publications, and has made guest appearances on several cable network news shows. He is involved in civic and denominational life, including the Mentor Pastor faculty at Perkins School of Theology, SMU and the Board of Trustees of Brite Divinity School, TCU. He was named "Baptist of the Year" by the Baptist Center for Ethics in 2004. He was inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. Board of Preachers at Morehouse College in 2008. He is married to Jana, has three children, and three grandchildren. He enjoys reading, hunting, and spending time at his ranch in Desdemona, Texas.

Virddie Montgomery, Principal
Wylie High School
2017 Ambassador of the Year

Virddie Montgomery began his 41st year as an educator this fall. Virddie began his career as a teacher and tennis coach at Brownfield High School in Brownfield, Texas. His success there led to his induction into the Texas Tennis Coaches Hall of Fame in 2003.

Virddie has served as a principal for the past 25 years with stops at Claude High School, Levelland Middle School, Levelland High School, Commerce High School, and now at Wylie High School. He has been blessed with several awards in his career including Outstanding Secondary Principal from the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP), Educator of the Year from the Levelland Chamber of Commerce, and Citizen of the Year in Commerce, Texas.

Virddie collects heroes and outside of his faith he lists his wife of 42 years, Pam, as his ultimate hero. She retired this year with 43 years as a teacher, counselor and administrator. Together they have three children and five grandchildren. He is active on Facebook, which he uses to promote his school. Another person he calls a personal hero Rachel Joy Scott, the first student killed at Columbine High School in 1999. Through her courage and writings prior to her death, her parents, Darrell and Sandy Scott, created Rachel's Challenge, a teen program that teaches the virtues "honor before victory" and "others before self".

Montgomery said, "Being selected as the Ambassador of the Year for Friends of Texas Public Schools is indeed an amazing honor that I am beyond measure humbled to receive. The promotion of public education has been my life's journey and to be honored by this prestigious organization is cherished. It truly stands for the values that I hold dear."



Johnny Veselka, Executive Director
Texas Association of School Administrators
Founders' Distinguished Service Award

The Founders' Distinguished Service Award was created to honor individuals or organizations whose support and service has been instrumental to the success of Texas public schools. The 31 years Johnny Veselka has served as executive director of the Texas Association of School Administrators where he has built a formidable reputation as an advocate for Texas public schools, the 5.2 million children we serve, and for TASA members as well as establishing TASA's mission to develop leaders who create student-centered schools and develop future-ready students.

A former classroom teacher in the North East Independent School District in San Antonio, Veselka joined the TASA staff in 1974. From 1979 to 1981, he participated in the Cooperative Superintendency Program, a doctoral superintendency program jointly sponsored by The University of Texas at Austin and the Texas Education Agency, earning his Ph.D. in educational administration in 1982.

For more details about the event or if you would like to consider a table sponsorship, please contact Jennifer Storm at jstorm@fotps.org. Visit the event website at www.fotps.org/FOY17

Friends of Texas Public Schools is a 501c(3) nonprofit, grassroots organization dedicated to restoring public confidence in our schools by promoting their many strengths and achievements. We believe the people of Texas have a right to know that, in spite of the many challenges they face, our public schools are achieving more today than ever in their history, and that the incessant, negative and oftentimes disrespectful conversation about public education is counterproductive to progress. To learn more visit www.FOTPS.org.

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