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Column

# A leader who really makes a difference

By ERNEST HOOPER  
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When Chase C. Stockon began searching for a new home in 1995, he explored a dozen cities, measuring the pros and cons of each.

He didn't take the decision lightly. The Washington, D.C., resident was leaving government to start a business, and he wanted a place that met his business needs and felt like home.

Stockon chose Tampa, and on Wednesday, Tampa chose him.

Leadership Tampa Alumni rewarded Stockon, the founder and operator of Panther International, with the Parke Wright III Award. The award goes to a member of the 600-person organization who has demonstrated exceptional leadership and a made a significant difference in the community.

Even as he was growing his online technology business into three national offices, Stockon was lending support to a number of nonprofit groups. He's past chairman of the Florida Aquarium and also serves on the board of the Spring of Tampa Bay.

"What it means to me is an acknowledgement that what we're doing in this community is what we're supposed to be doing," Stockon said of the honor. "If you think about the list of requirements - vision, courage, initiative, motivation, selflessness, dependability, commitment, accomplishment - I think we have a room full of people striving to do that."

Networking possibilities draw members to the leadership group, which operates under the auspices of the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce. Stockon, however, noted that with his company doing most of his

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business with government entities, his attraction to Leadership Tampa centered around the chance to become engaged in the community.

"We don't sell to the members," Stockon said. "We don't sell to the community. It's never been about the business to me."

Stockon's selection likely would have thrilled the late Parke Wright III, the former Lykes executive whose longtime service to the community inspired the award. Past winners of the Wright Award include attorneys Greg Yadley and Rhea Law, activist Dottie Berger MacKinnon, Tampa Bay and Company president Paul Catoe and Hillsborough County sheriff's Maj. Elaine White.

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"You're being compared to the best of the best," said Michael Carrere, executive vice president of Lykes Bros. and a longtime friend of Wright's.

The Lykes Foundation funded the award, which will allow Stockon to donate \$2,000 to the nonprofit of his choice. The foundation also awarded Big Brothers/Big Sisters vice president De'Anna Sheffield a grant to help cover the cost of her participation in this year's Leadership Tampa class.

The leadership organization's Philanthropy In Action initiative awarded a \$10,000 grant to America's Second Harvest at its annual luncheon Wednesday. The grant will be used to initiate a self-sustaining food purchase program.

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"Obviously, we're very excited because we've been focused for quite some time on starting this project," resource development director Marc Sutherland said.

DACCO received a \$1,500 grant and Everyday Blessings received \$1,000.

As for Stockon, he marveled over the award and the recognition. But I marveled over how a small win for Tampa turned into a big victory for the community.

That's all I'm saying.

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