

O&E THURSDAY, APRIL 11

Planning official's community spirit praised

By Casey Hane
staff writer

A special award ceremony Monday left Bill Burke speechless — a rarity according to Burke and those who have served alongside him on the Farmington Planning Commission over the past 30 years.

Family members joined to give the longtime community servant a "1991 Human Spirit Award" Monday night, as a surprise kick-off to the commission's monthly meeting.

"It's a culmination of a lifetime of commitment," said son Kelly Burke, a Maryland resident who was visiting this week and planned the event with other family members. "He's a fella who's sort of a throwback. It (community service) was always just what you were supposed to do."

"It's been inspirational to me."

The Human Spirit Award came in the form of a plaque presented, according to its wording, "for 30 years of caring for community and family."

BURKE WAS a bit embarrassed and quite surprised at the ceremony, calling it "as pleasant, as can be. These emotions are very hard to put into words," he added.

Burke began his city service years ago, following his involvement in the Floral Park homeowners group. "I was one of their early presidents, and used to come to council meetings," he said. He was recommended for the planning commission post, and appointed. "And with that, it began."

As president of the commission for about eight years, and a member for the other 22, Burke has attended, literally, thousands of meetings and public hearings. He is proud of the commission's record and its apparent good relationship with the city council, which "rarely reverses something we've recommended."

Burke has seen the city change from one experiencing growth to one that is fully developed. Today, he said, the planning commission's role has changed from one of monitoring

the growth to one of preservation and renovation.

OVER HIS 30-year tenure, several major issues have given him a sense of fulfillment, Burke said.

They include:

- The building of Farmington Place senior housing complex on Grand River, which was a highly controversial development. "I felt it was pretty important to the community," he said. "I thought it was the right thing to do. I was proud that went in."
- Preserving the city's central business district at the major cross-

roads of Farmington Road and Grand River, adding parking and other amenities without damaging the city's historic charm. "We've got a crossroads area that used to be horse and buggy," he said. "I'm glad we were able to preserve the vitality of the CBD."

- Denoting the valley through the community as a flood plain. This allows a green path, of sorts, through the community and prohibits building in that area.

- Preservation of the residential historic district. "There was a time when Oakland was in obsolescence in the master plan," he added.



photos by SHARON LeMIEUX/staff photographer

Longtime Farmington planning commissioner Bill Burke kisses his granddaughter, Lindsey Burke, after getting his award from family members Monday. At right is Lindsey's dad, Bill Burke's

youngest son, Kerry. From left are Trisha Burke, Kelly Burke and Patty Burke. Kelly, Bill's second-oldest son, lives in Maryland; Patty is his only daughter.



A pleased and surprised Bill Burke watches as family members present him with a "Human Spirit Award" Monday.

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