

# THE JEFFERSON AWARDS FOUNDATION – A CALL TO ACTION FOR VOLUNTEERING.



In 1972, along with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and U.S. Senator Robert Taft, Jr., Mr. Beard co-founded the Jefferson Awards Foundation (JAF) to create a Nobel Prize for public service.

The Jefferson Awards recognize both ordinary people who do extraordinary things and individuals whose public service has had a broad national impact.

National winners have included six Justices of the Supreme Court, including Sandra Day O'Connor, Sonia Sotomayor and Thurgood Marshall; seven Secretaries of State, including Colin Powell and Cyrus Vance; as well as Alan Greenspan, Bob Hope, Peyton Manning, Oprah Winfrey, Shaq O'Neal and Stephen Jobs.

Over 120 newspapers, television and radio stations herald local "Unsung Heroes" – the nation's largest media partnership fostering volunteerism. The media partners reach 100 million American families. More than 65,000 grassroots volunteers have been honored.

Beginning in 2007-2008, the Jefferson Awards began to use its prestige to change lives with a special focus on youth leadership and service. The Jefferson Awards Foundation has now trained more than 20,000 high school students, resulting in more than 20 million hours of service. A \$1 billion community impact.



*U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton and Sam Beard congratulating the 2007 Jefferson Awards winners.*



## JEFFERSON AWARDS

# FOUNDING THE JEFFERSON AWARDS

Watching the Oscars, I started to think, “Why isn’t there a Nobel Prize for public service?”- Sam Beard

In 1965-1966, Sam Beard began working for U.S. Senator Robert Kennedy as a young staff aide in Bedford-Stuyvesant, an inner city low-income community in Brooklyn, New York. Sam noticed that most young people were not attracted to public service. There was a prevalent attitude: “If you are talented, imaginative and hardworking, you’ll go into the private sector. If you are not very talented and lazy, you’ll work for a non-profit or the government.” Sam saw too many very bright, very hard working individuals working for the public good, and believed in the tradition – going back to the founding of the country – that the highest calling is public service.

I watched the Oscars and started thinking, “Why isn’t there a Nobel Prize for public service?” By accident, at a cocktail party, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis asked Sam if he had any ideas. When she encouraged Sam about the importance of the idea, the Jefferson Awards began.

“Many things in life are accidental. Because I worked with Bobby Kennedy, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was kind to me. I would see her once or twice a year. At a cocktail party Jackie made a mistake.

She told me, “Sam, you are energetic and filled with good ideas. What are you thinking about?”

My idea was to create a Nobel Prize for public service in America. She enthusiastically talked about how she and the President tried to get the best people into their administration. They knew the spirit of America was carried out by volunteers in neighborhoods. I called her the next morning, and she agreed to be the founding co-chair. Senator Robert Taft, Jr.’s brother, Lloyd, was working with me at NDC. Senator Taft became our co-chair, and we formed the Jefferson Awards.



*President George H.W. Bush congratulates Sam Beard and the 1989 Jefferson Awards winners.*

We started small. In 1975, an early national ceremony was held in the original Supreme Court under the dome in the U.S. Capitol building. Today, we have 120 television stations and newspapers that work with us honoring grassroots unsung heroes. The Jefferson Awards Media Partners reach more than 78 million American families. Our 2015 National Ceremony reached more than 100 million Americans.



*Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and Sam Beard welcome Jefferson Award winner Paul Newman to the U.S. Supreme Court. 1994*

## **Jefferson Awards Case Study**

Beginning in 2007-2008, we turned the Jefferson Awards into a “Call for Action” to multiply volunteering and community service in local communities. We have now trained more than 20,000 student leaders. Their schools report more than 20 million service hours. My daughter, Hillary, is now running the Jefferson Awards with a very active Board of Governors. The vision is to impact millions of lives in service with ages ranging from 4 to 104.”

The purpose of this case study is to show step by step, how this powerful idea became an important and prestigious national institution. The Jefferson Awards case study proves the Basic Step-By-Step Sam Beard Training System: How to take your Big Idea to change the world and make it a reality.

**THINK BIG**  
**YES, I CAN!**  
**CREATE A SIMPLE ACTION PLAN**  
**GET STARTED**

## Think Big

Create a Nobel Prize for public and community service in the United States.

Create a national awards system to inspire and attract Americans into public and community service at all levels.

Train American youth in leadership and service.

## Attitude: Yes, I Can!

Once Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis said what a great idea the award was, Sam Beard never hesitated. He had enough gumption to say, “Jackie, I’ll call you tomorrow morning. If you Co-Chair the awards, I’ll set them up.”

The odds against Mrs. Onassis signing on were high. Mrs. Onassis was being bombarded across America and around the world. She was turning down everything.



*Jefferson Awards Board Members Hank Aaron and Julian Bond honor Colin Powell and Jody Powell in the U.S. Supreme Court. 1990*

Sam called the next morning. Mrs. Onassis agreed to be the Chair. All the rest followed from that.

## Create a Simple Action Plan – Step by Step

### STEP ONE: RESEARCH

Research to assure that there is no other existing major national service award in America.

### STEP TWO: DESIGN THE AWARD SYSTEM

Ten originators spent a weekend at Duke University. We thoroughly discussed and selected the five still-existing national award categories. They best reflect the goal of attracting Americans into all levels of service. We eliminated the President and the Vice President from consideration. The categories ranged from “Greatest Public Service by an Elected or Appointed Official” to “Grassroots Unsung Heroes.”

### STEP THREE: BUILD CREDIBILITY. CREATE THE BOARD OF SELECTORS.

Once Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis had agreed to co-chair the awards, we reached out and enlisted U.S. Senator Robert Taft, Jr. to serve as the other co-chair. This made the awards non-partisan and prestigious. We then used the Kevin Bacon theory that everyone is six steps removed. We found someone knew someone, who knew someone. Our founding Board Members included: Muhammad Ali, Hank Aaron, Neil Simon, Bill Buckley, Jack Valenti, Kirk Douglas and U.S. Senator John Heinz.

#### STEP FOUR: IDENTIFY AND RECOGNIZE GRASSROOTS “UNSONG HEROES”

A founding purpose was to promote neighborhood volunteer service. We didn't know how, and postponed starting this category for four years. In 1976-1977 we began developing partnerships with local television stations and newspapers to serve as media partners. They created local selection committees who could verify the legitimacy and integrity of the community volunteers. In the first year, we started with seven media partners. By 2017, the Jefferson Awards had 120 Media Partners that reached more than 100 million Americans. More than 65,000 grassroots winners had been honored.

#### STEP FIVE: FINALIZE THE LOGISTICS. RAISE MONEY.

RAISE THE START-UP MONEY. Five founding board members gave us \$25,000.

DESIGN THE AWARD. After some fits and miss-starts, the Franklin Mint created the medallion we use today –a replica of the Great Seal of the United States signed by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and U.S. Senator Robert Taft, Jr. and Sam Beard.

INCORPORATE. A friend offered free legal services. We obtained our 501 (c) 3 public foundation approval from the U.S. Treasury Department.

SELECT THE AWARDS DATE. We weren't prepared until the summer of 1973. We had our first ceremony July 4, 1973.

FIND A PLACE. One of our board members knew of an existing July 4th event with a ready-made crowd of 5,000

attendees and fireworks. This was our start-up venue. By year five, we moved to the U.S. Supreme Court. In the 2000's, we outgrew the U.S. Supreme Court and began hosting the awards in prestigious local hotels.

## Four Keys to Success

The power of the idea. The vision.

The prestige of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Robert Taft, Jr. and the Board of Selectors

Involving the media to inspire grassroots “Unsung Heroes”

The enthusiasm and determination of Sam Beard.

## Two Main Obstacles

No one had ever heard of Sam Beard

We had no money.



*Jefferson Awards Co-Founder, U.S. Senator Robert Taft, Jr. presenting Award to Watergate hero Peter Rodino in the original U.S. Supreme Court, with Sam Beard presiding. 1975*



*First Lady Barbara Bush welcomes Jefferson Awards student honorees in the White House. 1989*

## Get Started

The key to the success of the Jefferson Awards was the power of the idea. As soon as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis agreed to help us, we started, and never looked back. Top people believed in the vision and joined. We had the courage to start, and we created a simple, step-by-step plan.

As we went along, we changed the plan and made improvements. We didn't rush, and tried to avoid mistakes. It took us four years before we were smart enough to reach out to the media to identify grassroots volunteers.



*Academy Award winning Ellen Burstyn honors Jefferson Award honoree Peyton Manning. 2006*

## Adjust as You Go

By 2007-2008, the Jefferson Awards had become the nation's leading service awards and had become very prestigious.

At this point, we began major programming to train students in leadership and service under the Jefferson Awards Foundation banner.

By year end-2016, we had trained more than 20,000 students in leadership. Their schools were reporting more than 20 million service hours. A \$1 billion community impact.



*U.S. Senator Barack Obama honors Jefferson Award winner.*



*U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy wins Jefferson Awards. 2009*

## Sam's Message to Students

My message is simple and powerful. Think Big. Believe: Yes, I Can. Create a Simple Action Plan. Get Started. Work hard. Enlist others. You can do anything you want.

Under President George W. Bush, the Jefferson Awards began working with John Bridgeland, Special Assistant to the President. We recommended that the president appoint a specific Presidential Council to oversee the awards and worked with the White House to add Americans of all ages. The President announced the President's Volunteer Service Award (PVSA) in January 2003. The Bush administration issued an RFP and the Points of Light Foundation won the opportunity to administer the awards.



The Jefferson Awards worked from 1989 through 2003 with three Presidents to create this grassroots presidential recognition system for service modeled after the President's Physical Fitness Awards. In perpetuity, our initiative will remain a cornerstone inspiring service in America.

“Sam Beard acts like he’s 42, and has the can-do spirit and energy of a 32-year old. President Bush was delighted to have Sam and the Jefferson Awards work with us to help create the President’s Youth Service Awards.”

*Gregg Petersmeyer,  
Assistant to President George H. W.  
Bush and Director of the White House  
Office of National Service*



*At the Presidents’ Service Summit in Philadelphia, Presidents Bush, Clinton and Carter, along with Mrs. Reagan, endorsed the Jefferson Awards initiated Presidents’ Student Service Awards and set the goal of involving 2 million students in service. 1997*