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Gov. Herbert recognizes SUU Vice President as “Champion of Rural Utah”

CEDAR CITY — Wes Curtis, Vice President for Government Relations and Regional Services at Southern Utah University, received the inaugural “Champion of Rural Utah” award from Gov. Gary Herbert during the 23rd annual Utah Rural Summit in August.

Herbert made the presentation with Spencer Eccles, Executive Director of the Governor’s Office of Economic Development. Eccles read the citation.

Curtis said he “gets a little uncomfortable with personal recognition” and added that he was honored and surprised by the award.

“Of course, it’s very humbling,” he said. “It’s very much an honor to be recognized by the Governor and the Governor’s Office of Economic Development.”

Curtis said he does not believe he is the sole contributor to the work that earned him the award.

“It’s not just my efforts,” he said. “It’s the efforts of a lot of people involved in improving the economy of rural Utah.”

The citation applauds Curtis’ efforts in rural Utah over the past 30 years. In addition to his position at SUU, it also mentions his current service as Director of the Utah Center for Rural Life and the Utah Rural Development Council. It also notes his past service as State Planning Coordinator and as rural affairs senior staff to Govs. Michael O. Leavitt and Olene Walker.

The citation also commends Curtis’ involvement in the Utah Smart Sites Initiative, the County Resource Management Plan Toolkit, and the 21st Century Communities Program — all programs that helped create rural jobs, manage rural resources and bring 21st century changes to rural areas, respectively.

In addition, the citation praises Curtis for his dedication to engaging SUU as a partner and resource to businesses, communities and governments through such means as the annual Utah Rural Summit, the SUU Business Resource Center, and various region-wide economic development, outdoor recreation, and natural resource planning partnership activities.

The recognition is nice, Curtis said, but he said there is still a lot of work to do, and he will continue working toward advancing the interests of rural Utah.

“The big thing we’re working on now is what we call economic gardening,” Curtis said. “We are trying to get the state to put some funding into it and make it available throughout rural Utah.”

The program involves visiting individual businesses, learning their needs, and determining whether if there is technical or financial assistance that would help them grow and expand, he said.

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Cutline for jpg titled “Wes Curtis”

Wes Curtis, SUU Vice President of Government Relations & Regional Services, was named “Champion of Rural Utah” at the Utah Rural Summit. Spencer Eccles of the Governor’s Office of Economic Development (behind) read Gov. Gary Herbert’s citation in connection with the award.