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Hawkins honored for his outstanding service, leadership

By **JOHN CARTER**
Staff writer

Folks will tell you he's humble and low-key.

So it's no surprise when he shrugs in explaining his community activism and attributes it to "simply having the time."

"A whole lot of people have hectic lives," said Arlington resident Lad Hawkins. "They're busy keeping shoes on their kids' feet, taking them to dance lessons, keeping up the pace. I'm a landscape architect and planner and I'm interested in preserving the environment -- and I have the time to represent the community. I soon found out that the simplest things you do, such as save trees, can make a huge difference."

Hawkins works with several city groups, but also resists some city-endorsed developments and street projects and has expressed impatience at the pace of city-promised neighborhood improvements.

Still, Hawkins and Mayor John Peyton embraced warmly at the podium in the Prime Osborn Convention Center recently when the mayor gave Hawkins an award at the 11th annual Mayor's Neighborhood Summit.

Hawkins got his award for outstanding civic service springing from his membership and leadership in such organizations as the Greater Arlington Civic Council, District 2 Citizens Planning Advisory Committee, Communities of East Arlington, JaxPride and Greenscape. He also volunteers to help individual neighborhood associations concerning parks, community revitalization, street beautification efforts and environmental protection plans.

The Ritz Voices choir sings for the audience at the Mayor's Neighborhood Summit June 23. DAN SCANLAN/Staff ----

Roberta Thomas, president of the Fort Caroline Club Estates South Civic Association, has worked closely with Hawkins on the Rogero Road Town Center Project and a variety of other Arlington issues. She says Hawkins is an intelligent, thoughtful colleague and tremendous asset to the community.

"Lad's unselfish ideas and love for Arlington reflect smart growth and a long and sustained record of incremental change that has resulted in positive and tangible results that will serve the county for centuries to come," she said. "... He's all about building a better community for the present and saving it for the future."

Thomas said Hawkins deserves special credit for working on several projects and issues, including:

Making the Wonderwood Connector a more attractive and neighborhood-friendly roadway.

Working to save a tree canopy in Arlington.

Protecting the Alderman Park neighborhood.

Helping to secure a site for a large botanical arboretum in Arlington.

Working to protect Duval County's river basins from detrimental effects of large-scale development in the controversial Freedom-Commerce Development project.

Boys' Home Association Family Services President Robert Brown (left) accepts a Neighborhood Organization Award from Mayor John Peyton. DAN SCANLAN/Staff -----

Serving on the mayor's steering committee for the "Seeds of Change" initiative in historic Arlington.

Appearing before public hearings before the EPA or the St. Johns River Water Management District to offer suggestions to protect the area's scenic beauty and wetlands.

"Lad's ideas and leadership have guided others into channels of thought and processes they had never considered," Thomas said.

Hawkins lives in a large hilltop Arlington home in the Holly Oaks area amid a sprawling expanse of huge, moss-draped trees, thick patches of fern and bunches of broad-leafed plants.

He is a wood sculptor and shares space in a crowded art studio in the house with his wife, Mindy Hawkins, who carves gorgeous birds from ordinary South Georgia gourds and co-owns First Street Gallery in Neptune Beach.

"We love the community and care a great deal about the environment," Hawkins said. "If I can do something to make a little difference in protecting or preserving it, then my time will be well spent. It's the least I can do."

In addition to Hawkins' award, Robert Brown accepted an award presented to District 2's (Arlington/Beaches) Boys' Home Association Family Services. The award read: "The Boys' Home Association Family Services has been providing food, shelter and guidance to 'wayward boys' since 1914. It has become a 'neighborhood center' and provides a wide range of support for families. This has opened their campus to organizations such as Horse Sense and Sensibility and the Arlington YMCA and for picnics and meetings of numerous community groups."

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