

2019 Ralph Gould Award Presentation Honoring Nancy and Tim Thompson

We are very fortunate here in Cape Elizabeth to live in a community where so many people are invested in service to their friends and neighbors, and commit their time, talents, and passion to making this town the special place that it is. Tonight we are pleased to give special recognition to two of our fellow citizens, Nancy and Tim Thompson, by honoring them with the Ralph Gould Award for Citizenship.

I want to share with you just a few of the many reasons Nancy and Tim were chosen as this year's award winner. But first, for those that might not be aware, I'd like to give you a little bit of background on Ralph Gould and this award that was established in 1986 and bears his name.

Ralph Gould was the consummate community leader -- a well-respected and successful businessman, the owner and operator of Gould Equipment Company; a supporter of the arts and music in the schools and community; a long-time member of the Cape Elizabeth Fire Department, and in fact one of the leaders of the Cape Elizabeth Fire Department Band, which performed for many years at public functions, parades, and at popular variety shows Ralph organized right where we're gathered today, which was at one time the town's auditorium.

I reached out to another distinguished Cape citizen and current president of the Cape Elizabeth Historical Preservation Society, Jim Rowe, for some thoughts about Ralph, and he shared this:

Every so often, his name would pop up as a significant benefactor to, or driver in this project or that, never in an obnoxious or ostentatious way, though... always quietly... almost unnoticed (unless you were looking.) That was his style. He was one of those individuals who, if you approached him with a well-defined and reasonable need, he had the means and the energy to help... always quietly.

It's that reflection from Jim that really resonates with me as I think about all of the incredible work that Nancy and Tim have done for the benefit of our community, so often without fanfare.

Nancy and Tim are long-time Cape Elizabeth residents, volunteers, and business owners. In 2004, they tragically lost their middle child Timmy, who had just graduated from Cape Elizabeth High School, to suicide. Since that time, and in his memory, they both have been passionate advocates speaking publicly about their loss in the hopes of saving lives. They urge those with emerging mental health issues to not take no for an answer and to push harder for services. They also encourage people to not be afraid to speak about their illness so they may be able to have others help them. And their efforts helped in the passage of legislation that put in place today's training requirements to help educators and staff identify students at risk and know what steps to take to help try to prevent suicide.

Last year, through their Thompson Mental Health Initiative, in collaboration with the school department and the Cape Elizabeth Education Foundation, and led by CEMS nurse Jill Young, they helped to launch a community-wide program focused on recognizing the importance of mental wellness, and creating a foundation of advocacy, education, and awareness. The

initiative, with the theme, “You will be found at CEMS,” helped to empower students, staff, and parents to be proactive and confident in caring for themselves and others, provide tools and tips for improving mental health, introduce health resources in or near our school community, and decrease stigma around mental health.

Several of us on the council had the chance to participate in this initiative in different ways, including the community read along of the book, *Finding Perfect*.

Their annual Thompson Award, given through CEEF, honors the faculty or staff member who reaches out to Cape Elizabeth students in lasting and meaningful ways, and go above and beyond what is expected, providing students guidance and mentoring. And they have both served on numerous boards and with community service and philanthropic organizations through the years.

To let you behind the current a little bit, the council actually discussed this award back in the spring, but with the summer months and various schedules to coordinate, it’s not until now that we got it on our agenda. In that light, I find it a bit ironic, or maybe serendipitous is the better way to look at it, that yesterday kicked off the annual National Suicide Prevention Week. I hope in some small measure, we’re doing our part to raise awareness here tonight.

In addition, over the last two years, Tim generously served on the Comprehensive Plan Committee. Probably not realizing what he’d gotten himself into, Tim served as its chair and was a steady hand guiding a dedicated group of fellow citizens through an extremely rigorous and detailed process to accomplish the important work of updating the plan that serves as the foundation for much of the town’s planning direction and ordinances. Councilor Penny Jordan, who also served on the committee, noted how Tim was very good at ensuring everyone on the committee was heard, how he’d ask questions when it seemed they were at an impasse, drawing out comments to ensure that all perspectives were voiced and considered. As is his style, he made sure it wasn’t about the loudest voice, but about the collective voice of the team. As Town Planner Maureen O’Meara described:

“Tim’s strength is a genuine interest in where folks are coming from. He wants to hear from you and puts folks at ease who may start from a point of controversy, anxiousness, or hostility. He made the public feel welcome as part of the process, and all staff feel appreciated.”

I was among those that saw some of these same characteristics on display as part of last year’s School Needs Assessment Committee. As part of a group representing a wide cross section of the community, Tim went from just asking a few questions and expressing some skepticism at a budget hearing, to getting involved to try and find areas of common ground, and to be part of the discussion to find solutions for a complex set of competing needs and priorities. School Board Chair Susanna Measelle Hubbs shared:

“While Tim and Nancy have long supported the Cape schools, Tim’s insights and energy for helping make the schools a safer and better place was evident in many discussion the committee held. His participation in the process garnered great respect from not only me, but my fellow board members and Superintendent. Most importantly, Tim’s

contribution of time and thoughtfulness during this process will forever benefit our students and our schools.”

I read somewhere once that thriving communities are places filled with common people doing uncommon work for the common good. And that sometimes from overwhelming community challenges come tremendous community opportunities. I can think of no better example of this than Nancy and Tim Thompson and their work in our community, and it is with great pleasure that I have the honor of presenting them with the 2019 Ralph Gould Award for Citizenship.