

Former Fresno Bee publisher Ray Steele Jr. wins Leon S. Peters Award

By Robert
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Fresno Chamber of Commerce announces the 2015 Leon S. Peters Award winner. THEFRESNOBEE

- Previous Leon S. Peters Award winners

Richard “Dick” Caglia, John E. Horstmann, Peter Mehas, Peter P. Peters, Joe Williams, Lou Herwaldt, Bill Jones, Sid Cox, Bud Richter, O. James Woodward III, Samuel Reeves, Octavia Diener, Robert Oliver, Frederick Ruiz, Anne Speake, Larry A. Shehadey, Claude Laval III, Robert Carter, Richard Johanson, James Hallowell, Lou Gentile, Earl Smittcamp, Helen Smades, William Lyles, Martin Nelson, Joe Levy, Frank Caglia, B. Franklin Knapp, James B. Mayer, Robert Duncan and Lewis B. Eaton.

Ray Steele Jr., a Fowler native who rose from young reporter to president and publisher of The Fresno Bee, was named the 2015 winner of the Leon S. Peters Award on Wednesday.

Per its tradition, the sponsoring [Fresno Chamber of Commerce](#) surprised the winner with the announcement at what Steele thought was a meeting with Fresno State President Joseph Castro on campus. Several chamber members and previous award winners congratulated Steele as he entered a conference room at the Madden Library.

“I am speechless,” said Steele, looking around the room at the previous award winners. “I can’t hold a candle to some of the people in this room and to Peters himself, but I appreciate this award and accept it with humility.”

Robert Oliver, a retired judge and former Peters Award recipient, said Steele serves as a shining example of what the award represents.

“This award is designed to recognize men and women in this community by virtue of their business success, philanthropy and integrity,” Oliver said. “And this year, Ray Steele is a wonderful recipient.”

Steele is a 1968 Fresno State graduate and the 2005 recipient of the Fresno State Alumni Association’s Outstanding Alumnus Award, presented on behalf of the College of Arts and Humanities at the Top Dog Alumni Awards Gala.

Steele joined The Bee in 1967 as a reporter. He rose to metro editor, overseeing local news coverage, before leaving Fresno in 1982 to be administrative director of The Sacramento Bee, a sister McClatchy Co. paper. He returned to Fresno in 1986 as The Bee’s general manager, then went back to Sacramento as a McClatchy corporate executive in 1993. He finished his McClatchy career as The Fresno Bee publisher from July 2001-October 2008.

Chamber president Al Smith said Steele has been an integral part of the Fresno community for most of his life, from his role as the publisher of a major newspaper to his participation in many civic organizations.

“He has proven to be not only an effective leader and a conscientious citizen but also a great contributor to our community,” Smith said.

Castro said he was also impressed with Steele’s commitment to the community and his passion for education. He said Steele was instrumental in launching a charitable fund that provides students with help in times of crisis.

“He has a real keen sense of the challenges that our students face,” Castro said.

The Peters Award, established in 1984, is named for the former owner of Valley Foundry & Machine Works. Peters also was a noted philanthropist in Fresno and the central San Joaquin Valley. The award recognizes business success and leadership as well as public service, contributions and investments in the Fresno area.

The award will be presented formally at the 36th annual Valley Business Awards Luncheon on Thursday, March 11 at New Exhibit Hall in downtown Fresno.

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