

# Diversity Champion

Dennis Kennedy's leap of faith to work as a change agent for inclusion and create the National Diversity Council was rewarded in 2010 when the DallasHR Diversity Committee unveiled the Dennis Kennedy Lifetime Achievement Award. This inaugural award honored Kennedy for his actions as a "heroic and legendary diversity pioneer, champion, and leader."

"Mr. Kennedy truly walks the walk and talks the talk. His passion is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week undertaking. Few people can keep up with his grueling schedule. Yet, he consistently makes himself available to assist others and help them advance their pursuit of a more diverse and inclusive work and living space," Gabriela Norton, who serves on the committee board for DallasHR, a human resources professional development organization, says.

The National Diversity Council, launched from Kennedy's brainchild organization called the Texas Diversity Council, now boasts 11 state and regional councils dedicated to spreading the word and advancing the cause of diversity and inclusion in all walks of life. Kennedy's goal is to blanket the country with councils in all 50 states.



Additionally, Kennedy created the National Women's Council, which focuses on advocacy for women, and the Council for Corporate Responsibility, which seeks to forward best practices education concerning social responsibility. He is also the founder of DiversityFIRST™ Publishing and produces California Diversity and Texas Diversity magazines, as well as 11 state newsletters.

A surprised and thankful, Kennedy accepted the award on behalf of all the people who "rolled up their sleeves to move things forward," he says. "Obviously, whatever you do in life that you work really hard at, you hope that someone will recognize your hard work. My name is on the award, but I wasn't the person that did all the work. There are so many other people who believed in the mission of the Texas Diversity Council."

While Kennedy was the first recipient of his namesake award, he will not be the last. "Through this award, DallasHR is able to recognize exceptional diversity leaders who are dedicated to our learning and understanding of what diversity means," Diane McClendon, the organization's executive director, says.

The award speaks directly to DallasHR's mission to advance the human resources profession and support the business community. "Successful businesses understand that their market is exceptionally diverse and will count on their HR team to ensure inclusion is embraced," McClendon says.

The discretionary award was given to Dr. Julia So in 2011. Like all future honorees, Dr. So embraces diversity and inclusion, leads by example, establishes and shares best practices, provides educational tools and is the caliber of professional that goes above and beyond to establish inclusion in all she undertakes. The award intends to also recognize passion for diversity and inclusion fueled by personal experiences or struggles for equality not only in the workplace, but also in life.

"DallasHR is an outstanding organization. For them to be recognizing individuals for their work in diversity and inclusion, I think, is tremendous," Kennedy says. In fact, the perpetual nature of this award is what excites Kennedy the most. "This is for the people that will be recognized in the future. There are so many diversity champions, change champions that go unnoticed. Obviously, this award is a tremendous opportunity to be recognized in the community in which you serve," Kennedy says.

By: Beth Douglass Silcox

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