

Tampa Bay Times

Hillsborough Tax Collector Doug Belden honored for leadership



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TAMPA — Doug Belden credits his grandfather with instilling in him a passion for politics at a young age.

The Hillsborough County Board of Commissioners honored that passion Wednesday by awarding the county tax collector the 2014 Ellsworth G. Simmons Good Government Award.

Commissioners commended Belden, a Republican, for improving the efficiency and quality of service within the tax collector's office and for taking pride in the work he's done since he was elected in 1998.

The office oversees collection of real estate and tangible property taxes, handles motor vehicle registrations and issues licenses for boating, fishing, hunting and driving in Hillsborough County.

Commissioner Mark Sharpe called the tax collector's office the "most modern and efficient agency in the state of Florida" under Belden's leadership.

"We actually had people within a government building saying, 'Wow, can you believe this excellent service?'" Sharpe said.

Belden, 59, received a standing ovation from a room full of Hillsborough County notables, including judges, politicians, lawyers and law enforcement and government officials.

"My gosh, you sure know how to pack a room," Sharpe joked before Belden stepped forward to accept the award.

Belden recognized the work of the 321 employees in the office, which touts an average customer satisfaction rating of 96 percent. His desire, he said, is to build on the success of the office and help it run as efficiently as possible.

"If it ain't broke, improve it," Belden said. "Even if we think we're doing well, we can always do better."



Doug Belden received the 2014 Ellsworth G. Simmons Good Government Award.

In 2008, Hillsborough was the first county tax collector in the state and first government organization in the county to be awarded the Governor's Sterling Award for Performance Education. The office was honored by the governor again in 2011 for continuing to serve as a role model for the public sector in Florida.

"Your standards of excellence should be replicated everywhere," Commissioner Sandy Murman told Belden. "Not just in the state, but in the country."

Belden said he was particularly touched by the diversification of support he received Wednesday from those in attendance.

"The greatest thing to me is pulling people together for the betterment of the community," he said.

The County Commission established the Ellsworth G. Simmons Good Government Award in 1996 to honor a person who improved government through leadership and vision. Simmons served seven years on the county school board and 21 years as a county commissioner.

Previous winners of the annual award include former Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio, children's advocate and former County Commissioner Dottie MacKinnon Berger and congressman Sam Gibbons.

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