

2018–19 Volunteer of the Year

Lisa Higginbotham, CRS, of FiveStar Awards

BY JULIE ROGERS

“If you ask my husband, Jeff, or my team they will tell you I have the ‘can’t say no’ disease,” said Lisa Higginbotham, CRS.

“I am very involved with Rotary, serving as foundation chair for my club and assistant district foundation chair. Jeff and I are in charge of barbecue plate sales for our club’s largest fundraiser, The Bone Suckin’ Sauce Peak City Pig Fest. I am co-chairing our district conference in May of 2020. Plus, I volunteer in the coffee shop at church.”

And that list doesn’t include her job as president and founder of FiveStar Awards & Engraving in Cary, NC, or the volunteering she has done for the Awards and Personalization Association since 2009.

“When Glenn Beckworth was president, he asked me to serve on the trade show committee. It was such an honor, and I really loved it,” she said. “I got hooked. I have served on a committee (sometimes two, if you include the ARIEF silent auction) every year since.”

That decade of work for the association earned Higginbotham the title of the Awards and Personalization Association’s 2018–19 Volunteer of the Year. She received the honor and her Gold Obelisk award during the Awards Celebration on February 14 in Las Vegas, NV.

Higginbotham had “absolutely no idea” she might win a Gold Obelisk this year. “I was so surprised! I was having a great time with the folks at my table at the gala, shoes kicked off under the table, halfway listening to (presenter) Warren (Knipple). I already had an idea in my head who I thought should win the obelisk for the category. My name was NOT on my (mental) list by any stretch!” she said.

Then, Knipple mentioned that the yet-unnamed recipient served 2 years as chair of the Education Committee. “Suddenly I realized Warren was talking about me! And so began the mad scramble for my shoes because running up there barefooted was not happening.”

After receiving her award and offering her thanks, Higginbotham “texted a picture back to my team at home, and they were so bummed to have missed being there.”

Next year, two employees will accompany the Higginbothams to Paris Las Vegas for the 2020 International Awards & Personalization Expo. “They are already on a mission!” Higginbotham said. “They let me know this weekend that they are laser focused on adding to our obelisk collection, whether by winning another category for the Gold Obelisk or the product contest for the Clear Obelisk award.”



This Gold Obelisk joins the store’s Gold Obelisk earned as Small Business Retailer of the Year in 2013 in FiveStar Awards & Engraving’s Wall of Fame area.

Higginbotham continues her volunteer leadership as a director under President Karen Guzman, CRS. Expect Higginbotham, a Certified Recognition Specialist and former Education Committee chair, to advocate for the association’s education program.

“From my perspective, education is the biggest value we can give our members. I cannot understand running a business without continuing to learn,” she said.

“The day I don’t learn something new is probably the day I start looking at retirement. Ha! That won’t ever happen!”

With plenty of obligations, why does Higginbotham continue to give her time to the Awards and Personalization Association?

“When it comes to the Awards and Personalization Association, I have had so many people pour into me over the years, teaching me how to do things, helping me to grow. Our company has quadrupled in size and we are going for an even bigger number this year. We live and work in an amazing and unique industry, where even competitors will help each other. My service to our association is giving back and paying it forward. I get phone calls all the time from people asking me how to do things and I am always happy to be ‘at their service,’ to borrow Karen’s theme!”