

---

# Saul Fontenot-Amedee Technology Maven of Portland

Step Up To The Plate

By Justin Ellis

Portland Press Herald Blog

October 04, 2007

[View story on website](#)

League of Young Voters billed Wednesday night's "Step Up To The Plate" awards as "not your typical awards ceremony. Which in some ways was true, but in others was only sort of true.

The League of Young Voters billed Wednesday night's "Step Up To The Plate" awards as "not your typical awards ceremony. Which in some ways was true, but in others was only sort of true.

Wednesday's occasion, which was also co-sponsored by the Bollard, was to recognize the work of the many people around Portland who do work to change people's lives in ways big and small, or generally just make living here generally pleasant.

In feting the city's best young social entrepreneurs, the League came up with eight unique categories:

Green Professional

Start-Up Business Person

Urban Ecologist

Artist

Service Worker

Technology Maven

Activist

City Employee

Healthy Lifestyle Educator

The nominees, and voting, were all done online, beginning with nominations in the August.

Walking away with honors - in this case a sweet engraved beer mug to drink with class and pride - Wednesday night were Forrest Keever of Green Tree Clothing and Mainely Masters Art Gallery, who won green professional.

Keever gave a nod to the League for bringing together so many community-minded people in one room, saying it takes people to talk about things like sustainable living and community action to bring about change.

"I see this award as shared. You can have a drink out of my cup any time," he said raising his mug to applause.

Kim Anderson and Anna Maria Tocci of the North Star Music Cafe won for start-up businessperson(s) of the year, start-up organic farmer Sarah Bostick won urban ecologist for her work creating community gardens around the city, and Vanessa Torres and Touching Ground took the artist award for their socially conscious music.

Saul Amedee took the technology maven award for his volunteer work educating on computer disposal and e-waste, Jill Barkley, organizer of the Dyke March (style?...just say queer and relationship violence advocacy) took activist honors and Heather Chandler, creator of the "Sunrise Guide" won healthy lifestyles educator.

Shana Paradis was recognized as the best city employee for her work as an English teacher at Deering High School. Paradis said she was flattered by the award, but told the audience she could not accept it without acknowledging the work being done by countless other teachers within the Portland schools.

"I want to say thank you to all the teachers and 'this one's for you,'" she said.

The regular fingerprints of the League were all over this event, to get in you could pay your age or on a sliding scale, there was no shortage of love for local hip-hop as SayLove! provided the evening's beats and the dress code was less than stiff.

But like I said in the beginning, saying it was "not your typical awards ceremony" was only half true.

After all, there were the obligatory cash bar and steamer trays filled with delicious finger food. There were more than a few politicians working the room, from City Council candidates such as John Anton, Jill Duson and Dan Skolnik, to candidates for Democrat Tom Allen's First District Congressional seat, including the Democratic state senator from "Handsomestown" himself, Sen. Ethan Strimling of Portland.

There was also a high profile guest, in this case the made-in-Maine beefcake and Olympic gold medalist Seth Wescott. Now I don't want to knock the first guy to win a gold medal in snowboard cross, but Wescott's remarks were rather short because he took more than a few minutes to screen a video on why snowboarding is his passion, which was odd. Still, as an entrepreneur and someone socially active himself, Wescott said finding what you are passionate about and following it is important, especially if it can benefit the community.

In the end I think it means something, because in the few (ok, four) years I've been working here, the League has gone from being an almost-outlaw group with a name we weren't completely able to spell out in print, to renting out one of the largest function rooms in the city - podium and all.

They went from an upstart group desperately trying to rally the skaters, graffiti punks, hip-hop heads and other smart, motivated and socially conscious people around town who have been otherwise snubbed by traditional politics and the party system.

Parties is something they largely did without, unless of course it meant bringing in a DJ, some breakdancers and having some Geary's, which I think everyone is okay with.

Now the League is working shoulder to shoulder with lawmakers (more than a few, including Rep. Herb Adams, D-Portland, were in attendance) to create laws, such as Opportunity Maine, and bring young voters into the political mix - see last month's local candidates debate.

Justin Alfond, statewide director for the League, told the audience young people are finally being seen as an integral part of Portland's community, and rising up in business and politics. Alfond said the League, through its voter education, community events and activism is supporting the next generation of Portland's leaders.

It's not exactly going from the outsiders to the political establishment so much as it is making a whole new scenario all together.

In the end, maybe the advertisers at Virginia Slims said it best: "You've come a long way, baby."