

First Farmers and Merchants Bank Names Ricky Watson 2012 Achievement Award Winner

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COLUMBIA, Tenn. – Ricky Watson, who spent a vast majority of his professional life in police work, most recently as Brentwood, Tennessee’s Chief of Police, has been named winner of the 2012 First Farmers & Merchants Bank Achievement Award, the bank announced today.

The police and security expert was recognized for the impact he’s had on the people living where he has served, and, especially, for his outreach to military veterans. He will be awarded the honor in an invitation-only ceremony in Brentwood on Friday, May 25th.

“Ricky Watson is a wonderful representative for First Farmer’s Achievement Award,” said First Farmers Chairman and CEO T. Randy Stevens. “Not only has he achieved much in a distinguished career in the field of public safety and security, but he has also been an example of high integrity in his personal life as he’s reached out to others wherever he’s lived. His actions have demonstrated how true, noble achievers live their lives in service to mankind.”

Launched in 2009, the First Farmers Bank Achievement Award seeks to recognize individuals who have been quiet but effective achievers and whose integrity and successes are representative of both the American spirit and the values of First Farmers. Previous winners include Aubrey Flagg (2011), an associate professor Geography at Columbia State Community College, David Weathers (2010), a Major League Baseball veteran and Lawrenceburg native, and Gwendolynne Smith Jackson (2009), a Knoxville veterinarian and graduate of Columbia secondary and collegiate schools.

“Ricky Watson’s work as Brentwood Police Chief earned him the respect of his officers and peers and embodies the spirit of public service,” said Brentwood Mayor Paul Webb.

“Ricky cares deeply about supporting our police officers, firefighters, as well as our returning war veterans and on a number of occasions organized support for soldiers without asking – or expecting – anything in return. In my judgment, his actions as both a community leader and citizen throughout his 26 years with the Brentwood Police force makes him a true achiever and honorable public servant.”

For years, Watson has spearheaded Brentwood’s efforts to provide comfort for Fort Campbell soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan and their families. In 2006, he organized a Welcome Home parade for the nearly 1,000 soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry regiment of the 101st Airborne Division, which the city “adopted” as their own. Four years later, he led the “Crocs for Troops” effort, which provided specially designed Crocs-brand shoes for the group, to help them navigate the rocky, dusty terrain during their off-duty time. The program was one of the reasons Watson was named Brentwood’s 2010 Person of the Year by the Brentwood’s Home Page.

He also has led an effort to make the home of a soldier who had lost both legs in an Iraq explosion wheelchair assessable and, more recently, to welcome home another Brentwood son who, likewise, had lost both legs in Afghanistan.

Watson once told attendees at the Citizens Police Academy graduation event that, "Law enforcement accounts for a small part of what we do. We are public servants. And this is part of what we do for the community." The son of Lucille and the late Floyd Watson, Ricky was raised in Columbia, Tennessee, and served in the United States Air Force from 1974 to 1976. After his service, he earned his Bachelors degree from the University of Memphis and joined the Memphis Police Department in 1978, working both the Uniform Patrol Division and General Investigations Bureau.

From 1982 to 1990, Watson was a member of the Tennessee Army National Guard and earned the rank of First Lieutenant, later serving as Acting Commander of Post Security at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. He joined the City of Brentwood Police Department in 1986 as Captain of Police Services in charge of operations, communications and criminal investigations and was elevated to Chief of Police in 2000.

Known for working for his officers, Watson is credited for bringing a sense of professionalism to the Brentwood Police Department and for shaping it into one of the best in the state, if not the nation. He retired from the Brentwood Police Department in January of this year.

"I'm humbled by all the accolades I've received for doing what I felt was the right thing to do where the safety and security of citizens were concerned," Watson said. "To me, it's been especially important for attention to be directed to our veterans, the men and women who simply do what the nation asks them to do, giving so much of themselves to keep this country safe. We can never repay them for their sacrifices, but I always wanted to make sure they knew they're appreciated."

Watson is a member of the American Legion, Columbia State Community College Advisory Board, the Brentwood Rotary Club, the Tennessee Association Chiefs of Police, the International Association Chiefs of Police and an alumnus of Leadership Brentwood. He has also served as a member of the First Farmers Williamson County Advisory Board.

He is married to Lisa, his wife of 30 years, and they have one son, John, 26, who serves as a police officer in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

"Ricky's commitment to public safety and those around him is commendable and was a big reason we chose him as this year's winner," Stevens said. "He also so clearly illustrates the values we hold dear at First Farmers, such as integrity, service and compassion for others. Achievers are made of characteristics like that."