

2007 STEPS COMMUNITY HEROES AWARDS PROGRAM
HELD ON JUNE 6, 2007 IN SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

KEN FESKE'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH
TRANSCRIPT OF VIDEO

KEN FESKE: When I first was notified that I was going to receive this award, I was deeply humbled and honored. And after participating in this conference this week, I have to tell you - like David [Fleming] said - I'm just overwhelmed because everyone in this room is a hero. And each one of us represent maybe a dozen or a hundred other people back home who have the same kind of energy and compassion. You have totally overwhelmed me with your synergy, with your wisdom, with your expertise. And I feel like the seventh husband of Elizabeth Taylor must have felt. I'm not Richard Burton and I'm not Eddie Fisher. And there's a part of me that thinks, you know, I know what's expected of me. But I don't want to just be good...I want to be memorable. And that's the kind of spirit that permeates Salinas.

We really are committed to making a tangible difference in the lives of our fellow neighbors and to really live a life that is memorable and lasting. And the energy that's present in Salinas, the spirit that lives on there, is truly wonderful. And I encourage you to get on the website because I'll bore you with all the wonderful things that we are about. But like Alyssa said yesterday and David or Patty affirmed this morning, the Steps program has invited other people to the table. And the faith community is one of those who can come to this initiative. We're not talking about end of life issues. We're not talking about issues of organ transplant or some other issues that maybe rub some people's ethics or morality. We're talking about health and wellness starting with these really basic chronic concerns.

I didn't know that this award was given for sacrifices because the only sacrifice I made was giving up doughnuts for fresh fruit on Sunday morning and giving up chocolate cake on Wednesday night for healthier more nutritious and healthier portions. That's about the greatest sacrifice I contributed. We started walking groups and at last length we had six groups that walked from Salinas to Jerusalem. And being good Baptists, they walked right across the waters of the Atlantic. And we also, you know, do everything else that caring people do as far as blood pressure checks and health clinics, etc. I left that congregation back in September and now I sort of left the parish ministry to do community ministry. And I work with the marginalized segment of Salinas that is the hub of drug trafficking and was prostitution - but we sort of relocated them - and homelessness. And we started, with the Buddhist and the Confucius communities, a homeless organic garden of thirty thousand square feet. And we hired eight formerly homeless individuals, one of which, Jim Ferguson, was a Vietnam vet. As a matter of fact when he was home on leave during Vietnam for his father's death, they put him on honor guard duty for a season and he couldn't stand the fact that the rest of his platoon was back in Danang. He paid for his way out of his own pocket to get from San Francisco to Saigon to go back to Danang. This is Jim's first job in fifteen years. He had his toe amputated because of diabetes two months ago and to try to help him switch to healthier lifestyle of nutrition is just one example [of what we do].

At the same time, I may be getting this award as an individual but in my heart you know I need to be, I'm accepting this for a whole community. There are a hundred and thirty people who are involved in our leadership program. Ten percent of those are here. I have thirteen people sort of scattered throughout this room and I've never worked with a more energized, committed, and resolute group of people than those hundred and thirty of them. I'm grateful for those ten percent that are there today. And I can't name any name except I have to lift up Susan Stewart who is our Mother Goose. And I call her that because I don't know if you've ever tried to herd geese or goslings, but we can be pretty feisty, ornery, independent people. But she does a commendable job and all I can say to each one of us is that as we leave this conference with renewed commitment and renewed zeal, may we really live life like Elizabeth Taylor's seventh husband. Let's make life memorable okay? Thank you.

END OF SPEECH