



## The Walter F. Snyder Award for 2004

Presented to  
**Peter D. Thornton**

"*Make yourself indispensable*" is likely to be the epitaph of Peter D. Thornton," writes a long-time colleague and friend. For thirty-two years, this environmental health professional has taught participative management, teaching and encouraging staff, at all levels, to take ownership in problems and develop innovative solutions.

"Do not perform inspections just for the sake of performing inspections -- make a real difference in somebody's quality of life!" This statement often heard by his colleagues, provides a quick glimpse into the character and dedication of a man committed to environmental health as subscribed by the award's namesake, Walter F. Snyder.

Mr. Thornton prepared for his career in environmental health in Binghamton, New York receiving an associate degree in Applied Science from Broome Community College. Then moved on to Ferris State University, Big Rapids, Michigan, where he earned his Bachelor of Science degree, in 1972. With degree in hand, Thornton accepted the position of Water Pollution Control Specialist with the City of Gainesville in Georgia. It was a stepping-stone to the Florida Department of HRS Broward County Health Department, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

As an inspector, investigator, and surveyor of food service facilities, sewage disposal systems, water supplies, solid waste collection and institutional establishments; Thornton knew environmental health was his forte. He was granted educational leave with pay by the State of Florida to attend graduate school at the University of Michigan, School of Public Health, Ann Arbor, Michigan, receiving his Masters of Public Health in 1976.

Thornton returned to Florida Department of HRS Broward County Health Department where he advanced through the ranks of supervisor, project manager, industrial hygienist, and assistant director. Never accepting mediocre performance by his staff, a colleague and friend remarked, "his continuing success is not only because he is a visionary, but a motivator of his employees... he empowers his staff and encourages them to believe in themselves. Though the nature of the environmentalist's work is primarily regulatory, each person has the ability and opportunity to educate, motivate, and encourage the people to do the right thing for their community and their environment."

In 1985, Thornton was recruited by the Florida Department of Health/Volusia County Health Department (VCHD) to administer a total comprehensive environmental health program in Volusia County (population 410,000).

Thornton accepted the Environmental Administrator position and the new challenge with enthusiasm and 'hit the ground running.' He introduced TQM/Participative Management to VCHD and developed and organized a Graphic Design Team in Environmental Health to produce interactive computer based training modules. The team's first effort produced a now nationally marketed and recognized Computer Based Training (CBT) CD for onsite sewage treatment disposal systems. Earlier this year, the Centers for Disease Control purchased a copy of the Swimming Pool and Spa CD-ROM training for every local health department in the United States. The private pool industry uses it to train their employees.

His prodigious and prudent use of computers in applications for environmental health has made VCHD one of the premiere environmental health programs in the State of Florida. He has developed the department's GIS system and introduced pocket computer systems that combine GIS, inspections, emergency management, and groundwater protection into a concise but powerful application.

His leadership introduced cross-functional, cross-trained teams to investigate community health conditions, involving both local leaders and the medical community to promote healthy living and lifestyles to Volusia's citizens. The overall goal will create an action plan, which will significantly improve health and living conditions for citizens.

Thornton's concern for - and willingness to reach out to - the community and his profession led him to

- be an active member of the Florida Environmental Health Association (FEHA) serving as vice president, 1986, president elect in 1987, and president in 1988 and editor of Florida Journal of Environmental Health.
- be an active member of NEHA, serving on its Board of Directors in 1988; stepping through its ranks to president in 1996-97. One of only three FEHA members in the past 50 years to attain such distinction, he was awarded Life Membership in both FEHA and NEHA in 1998.
- serve as Chairman and Editor of the National Conference of Local Environmental Health Administrators from 1993 to 1995.
- Accept appointment by President Bill Clinton to serve on the National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC) in 1998.

Well known in his profession, Thornton is frequently called on as a Keynote Speaker or presenter. In the past decade he has given more than 30 presentations throughout the U.S., Canada and the United Kingdom. He has authored numerous articles for the Florida and NEHA Journals, the NCLEHA Newsletter, the New Zealand Journal of Environmental Health, and the Environmental News Digest, to identify a few. His dedication has brought him well-earned recognition. His list of awards include: 2001 Charlie Rhodes Award from the Florida Environmental Health Association (FEHA); Outstanding Environmental Health Professional, FEHA; Excellence in Environmental Health, NACHO; Davis Productivity Award, Florida Tax-Watch, Inc. & Winn Dixie Stores; and, 1995 Billy G. Tennant Meritorious Award, FEHA.

Mr. Thornton and his wife, Tekla, of twenty-seven years, reside in Deland, where they raised four children: Charles, Michael, Aaron, and Ailissa.

The president of Florida Environmental Health Association states, "I have no reservation about his [Pete's] worthiness to receive this award... he is a pillar of strength in support of professionals in Environmental Health... an inspiration for generations to come by continually finding new ways and new technologies to achieve greater efficiency and ease in our field."

For his integrity and compassion to his profession, his state, his fellow man, it is indeed an honor and pleasure to present to Peter D. Thornton, the 2004 Walter F. Snyder Award for achievement in attaining environmental quality.

### Past Recipients of the Walter F. Snyder Award

Callis F. Atkins  
Ralph C. Pickard  
William A. Broadway, Jr.  
James E. Jump  
Charles L. Senn  
Charles C. Johnson, Jr.  
Larry J. Gordon  
Ray B. Watts  
John G. Todd  
Charles H. Gilham  
Emily T. Chanlett

John R. Bagby, Jr.  
William Anderson  
William G. Walter  
Albert H. Brunwasser  
George A. Kupfer  
Mark D. Hollis  
Boyd T. Marsh  
Harvey F. Collins  
Trenton G. Davis

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Robert M. Brown  
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Friedrich K. Kaferstein  
Robert W. Powitz  
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