

Dunbar Award Bio



MARY GINN, SPHR
Of Baton Rouge – 2009 Winner
CHARLES E. DUNBAR, JR. CAREER SERVICE AWARD
By the Louisiana Civil Service League January 29, 2010
Under State Civil Service
Human Resources Director
Department of Natural Resources
NOMINATED BY: Robert D. Harper

Mary Ginn began her state government career at the Department of Civil Service working in the Examining Division. She has worked since 1982 in the human resources field as Director of Human Resources for the Departments of Veterans' Affairs and Culture, Recreation and Tourism. After 22 years in the HR field, she was promoted to Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Office of State Parks in 2004. In 2008, she had an opportunity to return to the HR profession (her true calling) as the Human Resources Director for the Department of Natural Resources where she is currently employed.

Mary was Chairman of the Louisiana State Personnel Council in 1997 and Vice-Chair in 2001 and 2009. She served five years on the Board of the Greater Baton Rouge Society of Human Resources Management. During her 1994 presidency, the chapter received a Superior Merit Award recognizing excellence in chapter operations and a commitment to providing outstanding programs and services to the members. The chapter also received the Pinnacle Award for innovation, creativity and leadership. She served five years on the International Personnel Management Association (IPMA) Louisiana Chapter Board and was the 1990 President. She served on the Human Rights Committee at the international level for IPMA. She has been a

member of the La Capitol Federal Credit Union Supervisory Committee since 1998 providing oversight of the audit function.

In 1995, Mary earned professional certification as a senior professional in human resources (SPHR) awarded by the HR Certification Institute. In 1998, she achieved lifetime certification.

She has taught many professional development courses and presented at conferences and meetings on a wide range of HR and management topics over the last 25 years to public and private sector organizations.

Mary was the recipient of the 2008 Golden Heart Award presented by the Humane Society of Louisiana for her role in animal protection while working in the Office of State Parks. She created and implemented policies and procedures regarding the humane treatment and handling of wildlife and domestic animals throughout the state park system.

She is a liturgical minister in the Catholic Church and has enthusiastically organized fundraising for the Capital Area United Way for the last 20 years. She has worked as a volunteer with the YWCA and participates in the Read-A-Loud program to the young children of Park Elementary School.

Words Mary has lived by for the entirety of her career are, “Do the right things for the right reasons,” and, she has!

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Mary Ginn (right) with Deputy Secretary, Lori LeBlanc

Q. At the February 2010 Commission meeting, you were praised for your Department's HR accountability report. What is your secret for success?

A. Definitely a competent and conscientious staff. Beyond that, excellent leaders in DNR and OCPR who know the benefits of doing things the right way the first time.

Q. What do you enjoy most about your job as an HR Director?

A. I love being able to help people on so many levels. You can help others find jobs, determine their future, strengthen their skills, cope with their issues and make needed changes. I have kept personal notes from those I have assisted through the years. If I'm having a bad day, I can read some of those heartfelt notes. The dark days are days when I feel regretful that I couldn't do more for someone.

Q. In your opinion, how does one go about developing the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics necessary to serve as an HR Director?

A. You have to be open to constant learning. You have to have a sincere desire to help people. You must have subject matter expertise. You have to be a good listener, a diplomat, a strategist and a psychologist. You must be proactive and principled. You must be a coach and mentor. You can help employees develop their career and their life. You can help them change their perception and behavior. You must be trustworthy and have great integrity. You must have a knowledge of your department's business. You must have quick reflexes to respond to the rapid pace of change. You must be flexible so as to be perceived as a business partner vs. an HR road block. You need input and insight from other HR professionals. Being active in such organizations as the Society for Human Resource Management will give you access to some of the best minds in HR around the world and will keep you informed of changes that affect your work.

Q. What has been the biggest challenge you've encountered while serving as an HR Director and how did you address it? What was the outcome?

A. There have been many challenges through the years, but without a doubt, the biggest challenge has been the various budget cutting scenarios that have played out over the 24 years I have been a Director. Oftentimes, we were preparing lists of names of people to be laid off. As Director in an organization, you know your people and their stories, and all have obviously needed their jobs.

One particular situation immediately comes to mind. Early in my career while processing one of the many lists of casualties, I received a call from an elderly man who was eligible to retire and was being asked to do so to minimize the effects of the layoffs on others. He had recently lost his wife of many years and he was devastated. I will always remember his words. He said, "If I retire, I will die. I have nothing to live for." I immediately contacted the Executive Director to appeal on his behalf. I will never forget the Director's words. "Ms. Ginn, if you want to call a young man with a family and tell him he going to be laid off then you go ahead and make that decision." It was not an easy decision, but I knew the young man would have opportunities that Mr. Smith (fictitious) would not. The young man was laid off and had another job at a higher salary in less than one week and Mr. Smith continued to work for a number of years after. He said so many times through the years, "you saved my life!" I don't know if I did or not, but I know it was the right thing to do at that time. The hard decisions are challenging. You follow your conscience and do what you think is best. No doubt, we are facing the most challenging

times of all with the current budget situation. Do not be afraid to ask the hard questions and suggest alternatives.

Q. You have been an inspiration to others in your career, but who inspires you and why?

A. Selfless people like the heroes of 9-11 and the Haiti rescue mission. The very thought that no matter where you are in your life that you would enter a burning building to save others or leave your family, risk personal illness, and participate in search and rescue. It's amazing to me that there are heroes all around us that risk their lives every day in our community. They teach a very important lesson of putting others first. I want to be more like them.