

Hall of Fame Award Nomination

The Iowa League of Cities Hall of Fame award was created to honor individuals whose service to the League has been deemed to be extraordinary.

Individual Nominated: **Terry Lee Donahue**

Position: **Mayor, City of North Liberty**

Nominated by: **Ryan Heiar, North Liberty City Administrator**
Kelly Hayworth, Coralville City Administrator

Brief Biography:

Terry Lee Donahue was born in September 1946 to Thelma May and Robert L. Donahue of New Albany, Indiana. Robert was a foreman at General Electric Company (Louisville, KY) and a WWII veteran. Terry graduated from New Albany Senior High School in 1964. He attended Indiana Central College (now University of Indianapolis) where – like many students – he began his education in one field, majoring in mathematics and minoring in music, his sights set on a career in secondary education, but graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Economics. He spent his high school and undergraduate years participating in band, choir, and basketball, adding new interests in college like Model United Nations and radio broadcasting, and was an active member of the Alpha Phi Gamma honor society for journalists. He was elected to a variety of leadership positions on the Central College Council and the Central College Choir. He completed his undergraduate education in 1968 with 87 students in his graduating class.

Terry immediately began pursuing a Master of Science in Rehabilitation & Counseling Psychology at Indiana University and graduated in 1970. In September of the same year, he married Miss Roberta “Robbie” Jean Boelman, of Meservey, Iowa, a graduate of Allen Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in Waterloo. While living in Waterloo, Robbie worked as a Registered Nurse at Schoitz Hospital and Terry transitioned his counseling psychologist internship into full employment with the Mental Health Institute in Independence. Terry and Robbie moved to Dubuque and had a son, Jason, in 1973 and daughter, Heather, in 1974 while Terry worked as a rehabilitation consultant for handicapped and special education students in the Dubuque County School System.

In the mid-1970s, Terry and Robbie moved their family to Creston, Iowa (est. pop 8,330), where Terry began a job supervising the Creston Area Office of the Iowa Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVR), a team of two that covered a seven Iowa county region for the State. With this pivotal promotion at DVR he established roots in Creston and launched his involvement in local government. Terry first began by serving on the Southern Iowa Regional Transit Advisory Committee, representing vocational rehabilitation interests. He was elected to the Creston City Council in 1977 and served four years before being elected Mayor in 1981.

While Mayor of Creston he dealt with a cornucopia of mid-size, rural Iowa town issues ranging from major economic shifters, like the fallout of the 1980s farm crisis, to local drama, like every single resident sharing their opinion on the downtown “historic brick paver vs practical concrete” streets renovation project. While dealing with the varied state of affairs in Creston, he honed his skills for future use in North Liberty, developing his unique “no nonsense” approach attested by City staff and residents alike.

One of his first challenges came on February 3, 1982, when the Washington DC Environmental Policy Institute shared Nuclear Regulatory Commission plans to move 500 tons of highly radioactive nuclear waste from Nebraska to Illinois via train - on rails going right past Creston - over a period of three years. Coincidentally, the next day on February 4, 1982, a train derailed one mile east of Creston, exacerbating the appeal for safety measures. Fortunately, the chemical that spilled from that tanker was non-toxic. But the coincidence of the matter did not do well to assuage resident concerns about the potential for a spill from the nuclear waste casks. Terry took the initiative to collaborate with other cities along the Burlington Northern line to develop a disaster plan and to schedule public information sessions so residents and local officials can ask questions of the rail company and nuclear district.

After years of tough challenges and important decision-making... the (still) unsolved murder of 17-year-old Corinne Perry, the public advisory group recommending concrete over the pavers, a construction contractor ruining Creston’s airport runways (after being hired to resurface them), a CBS Sunday Morning News story highlighting Creston as an example of a dying farm town on national television, the loss of Union County’s only subsidized child care center, and Southwestern Community College student ruckus... Terry was elected to the “League of Iowa Municipalities Board” (eventually renamed the Iowa League of Cities) for the first time in 1988 and gave a speech at the following year’s Annual Agricultural Outlook Conference about how Creston is setting the standard for success.

In this speech, Terry explains how essential it was to diversify the economy of Creston - from a farming town to a manufacturing destination - using real communication, a coalition of primed stakeholders with varying interests and talents, a prospect package for industry to visualize the potential of the community, and major investments in water and sewer infrastructure ahead of the prospectors. In fact, for Terry, resuscitating infrastructure in the Creston region multiplied the benefits for all, propelling the coordination of the seven county Three Mile Lake Project. *“When you talk about farming, you talk about family.”* Terry believed that when families are happy, they remain. Affordable loan programs, rental housing, senior citizen housing, and residential group homes for physically/mentally ill family members were all added to Creston during his time there.

“The role of government is helping to establish lines of communication.

If there is no real concern, there is no real communication.

If there is no communication, there can never be cooperation.

If there is no cooperation or if that is absent, no commitment can ever exist.

When commitment dies, so does the community.”

After spending 1994 as President of the League of Iowa Municipalities, Terry did not seek reelection for Mayor in 1995 and accepted a position as the first Executive Director of the Union County Development Association (UCDA), expanding the time and effort he could spend on economic development. He focused on the revitalization of the Creston downtown; encouraging private and public collaboration through joint development ventures.

After 27 years with the Iowa Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and two with the UCDA, Terry was lured to North Liberty in 1998 by the Oakdale Medical and Classification Center. When he began as Associate Warden/Business Manager, he was responsible for supervising a \$17 million budget with 350 employees and 1,000 inmates. It did not take long for Terry to jump back into a public service role, through an appointment to the North Liberty Planning & Zoning Commission, then becoming Chairperson in 2000. At the time, the only school in North Liberty was Penn Elementary and the Census Bureau counted the population at 5,367, but the City already had active plans on the P&Z desk to add seven major housing additions, adding 500 new homes.



North Liberty, 1995



North Liberty, 2003

Fast forward seven years later, Terry has retired from Oakdale, North Liberty has sprouted about 4,000 more residents, two elementary schools have been added to the network and one more is under construction... so, Terry vies for one of three open City Council seats and wins by running on a platform of conscious oversight of the growth of business and residences, matching the climate of haste with Terry's brand of sensibility and vision.

Terry did not hesitate to vote against the norm, even when he knew the others would reach consensus. A solitary down vote is a statement. A statement narrating the incompleteness of a thought or plan. A statement against inconsistencies in approach. A statement registering the values of the opposition, validating their voice. A statement questioning the rush of a decision.

During his retirement, Terry revisited his talents from that pursuit of a secondary education degree by becoming a regular classroom volunteer at Van Allen Elementary School. Terry and Robbie moved Robbie's mom, Bonnie, into the North Liberty Living Center, where Terry was a frequent face and residents still remember him fondly.

In the public arena, he served as Past President of the Iowa League of Cities in 2012 and 2018, North Liberty 2013 Centennial Committee Chairperson, a Metropolitan Planning Organization of Johnson County (MPOJC) Board Member, a North Liberty Small Business Loan Committee Board Member, and is the current North Liberty Transit Advisory Committee Chairperson. He has overseen a City experiencing exponential growth, with improvements in transparency and budgeting, a focus on economic development and strategic planning, and significant investments in water, waste water, and public safety infrastructure; community spaces - like the Library, trails, ponds, and parks; social service support mechanisms; and recreational opportunities, in the form of programs, clubs, and lessons.

Terry is quick to respond to a new community need, trend, or request with well-constructed discourse, whether it is diversifying North Liberty housing stock, increasing job prospects, raising the minimum wage, meeting transportation needs with a creative solution, or considering new City policy. From his time leading an economic development association, Terry contends that mentorship guidance and incentives are key to business development. He has stated that North Liberty has clinched a niche identity in the region and cultivating that will lead to success.

In February 2017, Terry was selected by City Council to serve as Mayor Pro-Tem and subsequently elected to complete that term as Mayor... and then reelected to a full four-year term, currently serving through the end of 2021.

Terry has used this public platform and free time during retirement to make himself readily available and responsive to City Administration and Department Head personnel. He is able to have a high degree of visibility in local organizations for the benefit of City of North Liberty interests. Terry says he can only respond to issues if he is aware of their existence, so he likes to keep his ear to the ground.

His approach to the chaos of 2020 is no different.

The strength of any elected official is defined by that person's leadership, guidance, and humility. Terry committed himself to Johnson County's coordinated COVID-19 response through the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Terry committed himself to the City's coordinated COVID-19 response by being present at every virtual meeting, a source of support, an advocate for the City of North Liberty, and a conduit of information from the EOC. Terry committed himself to speak at a peaceful rally on the movement against police brutality of Black, Indigenous People of Color BIPOC. Terry committed himself to Chief Venenga as they address changes in Police policy.

"City government has been – and is – a task I clearly enjoy."

And it shows, Terry. Thank you.

In your view, what has this person done to provide extraordinary service to city government or the League?

Current Coralville City Administrator Kelly Hayworth

... also, former Creston City Administrator in the 1980s

“Terry’s economic package brought a Trolli Gummi brand factory to Creston. This was a company headquartered in Germany that chose rural Iowa for the location of a large manufacturing plant. This was a major project for the community that was successful for many years, especially important for the Creston area, as it created supplemental employment to struggling farming families in the 1980s.

Terry also used his leadership and visioning skills to develop an urban renewal plan, thereby convincing the new Fareway to build in the heart of downtown instead of on the edge of town.”



North Liberty Assistant City Administrator Tracey Mulcahey

“He is one of my favorites.

Everything he does, he does wholeheartedly. The entire year of North Liberty Centennial events would not have happened without his help. He attended every meeting, brought great ideas and jumped in with both feet every time asked.

My favorite memory was him showing up for the parade to promote the July Birthday Bash in full makeup! No one knew who he was. The City’s birthday celebration was super special directly because of his involvement.

At the parade, he bonded with my youngest daughter Ryleigh. She forged a very special place in her heart for him. He has always made sure to check in on her status with me regularly and she asks about him, too. He gave her a graduation card with a super heartfelt and personal message to her. She still talks about how impactful that was on her.

Terry goes above and beyond in every angle of his life. He is an asset to North Liberty, the community and the State of Iowa. We are super lucky to have him as a teammate.”

North Liberty Streets Superintendent Michael Pentecost

“Terry has proven to be a well-respected leader by both the residents he serves and the coworkers (City Staff) he works with. He is a great manager by understanding big picture concepts while not leaving out important details. He trusts the expertise of the staff working for the public, while keeping a pulse on

what the City needs to improve overall North Liberty quality of life. He is smart, supportive, compassionate, assertive, and driven. I enjoy working with Mayor Donahue."

North Liberty Human Resources Director Debra Hilton

"Mayor Donahue has been a huge supporter of staff during this COVID-19 pandemic and someone that we can rely on for sound advice and encouragement. He sits in on our management team conference calls multiple times a week, always willing to listen and displays great concern for ALL City staff members."

North Liberty Communications Director Nick Bergus

"There are two things I've long appreciated about Mayor Donahue. First, is he trusts the work we do and to do good work. Second, when he saunters into the office — I always sit up a little straighter — it's to check in us, and, most importantly, he always calls us 'kids.'"

North Liberty Building Code Official Tom Palmer

"Mayor Donahue's leadership, knowledge, and experience in building safety is a tremendous value for the citizen of North Liberty and the Building Department."

North Liberty Police Chief Diane Venenga

"Mayor Donahue has been a dedicated, considerate, and selfless leader for the City of North Liberty. Ever since I have been here, he has been willing to step in and lead this community with honor. He continues to represent the citizens and employees well and is thoughtful in how decisions made will impact our town. Terry Donahue has been a true champion for North Liberty, and not only for our residents and business partners, but also for our staff. It has been a true pleasure to work with him in this constantly changing and growing community."

North Liberty Recreation Director Shelly Simpson

"Mayor Donahue exhibits great leadership... he listens to others before offering his own expertise or knowledge on subject matter. He stays informed and in-the-know, by making physical visits to each department. He seems to enjoy his duties as he greets everyone with a smile & hello. Mayor Donahue is approachable, shows compassion, and takes a down to earth approach as he represents and leads the city."

North Liberty Waste Water Superintendent Drew Lammers

"I have had several encounters with Terry, whether it be passing by in City Hall, at City events, or group meetings. He has always acknowledged myself and others around. He mentions how he appreciates everyone's hard work and dedication. Many times, he has some great humor to add as well. It's always nice to hear, and witness his positivity and appreciation spread through the City as a whole."

North Liberty Library Director Jennie Garner

"Terry is a fair-minded leader who provides support and feedback to department heads in the city. He always takes time to visit and ask about your well-being when you see him. He also asks good questions and shows interest in departmental projects and services."

Why do you feel this person should be a member of the Hall of Fame?

Referring to his not brief biography above, Terry is one of the few people who has served the Iowa League of Cities from two different cities. He has served as President, Past President, and several terms as board member while with the City of Creston and with the City of North Liberty. Terry is not filling an official role on the Iowa League of Cities this year - for the first time in a while - which allows us to (finally) nominate him for his service.