

Wm. Weston J. Newton, Chairman
January 12, 2009
Recognition of W.R. Skeet Von Harten

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have the honor today of recognizing a true public servant – one of South Carolina’s finest sons, W.R. Skeet Von Harten.

Skeet was born and raised in the Lowcountry. A self styled “river rat”, there is no one more devoted or committed to the well-being of the land, waterways and the people of South Carolina. He has devoted his life to public service and his commitment has furthered our County, our State and our Nation.

Skeet has served on Beaufort County Council for ten years – from 1989 to 1992 and again from 2003 to 2008. He served as Chairman and Vice-Chairman, helping to lead the County through times of unprecedented growth, and for that he is considered the venerable Dean of Council.

Skeet’s life-long commitment to public service also includes development of the Beaufort County Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse. Skeet became the Commission’s first Executive Director and served in the capacity for ten years.

Skeet is a distinguished, decorated, retired Marine Corps Lt. Colonel, who earned a Presidential Citation as an outstanding Vietnam Veteran in South Carolina. He also achieved two Bronze Stars, the Purple Heart, and a Silver Star for Valor during the Vietnam War. Because of his community achievements, in 1979 Skeet was selected by Am Vets as one of South Carolina’s most accomplished Veterans.

Skeet is a graduate of The Citadel and earned an MS in Foreign Affairs for George Washington University, and also attended the U.S. Naval War College. Skeet has distinguished himself through remarkable efforts that have reached far from the shores of Beaufort County and across the entire State.

As Chairman of the Beaufort County Council Military Affairs Committee, Skeet was a force that helped convince Federal lawmakers of Beaufort County’s outstanding commitment to its local military. By initiating military-friendly policies and through activism and dedication, our local bases and our local economy were spared. This effort had impacts far beyond the Lowcountry.

As Chairman of the Beaufort County Council Land Management Committee, Skeet was an integral component in our endeavor to partner with the Department of Defense, through the Department of the Navy, for the purchase and subsequent preservation of property adjacent to Beaufort’s Marine Corps Air Station, thereby protecting the Air Station from encroachment. Through this effort, Beaufort County was the first local government in the Nation to partner with the Federal Government in land preservation to protect a Marine Corps facility.

With Skeet's leadership, Beaufort County's Rural and Critical Land Preservation Program has developed as one of the finest local government land preservation programs in the State, if not the Nation.

Skeet has served as a member of the Board of the South Carolina Association of Counties. His local leadership positions are numerous. He served on the Broad River Health Care Commission. He is a member of the Board of the Beaufort County Water Festival and has served as its Commodore. He is also a member of the local Advisory Board of SCB&T and has held leadership position in several clubs and civic organizations, including the top leadership positions at the Burton Fire Commission, the Beaufort Citadel Club, Am-Vets Post 70, Sea Island Rotary Club and the citizen group – The Military Enhancement Committee. He was selected for the Greater Beaufort Chamber of Commerce Award for outstanding government leadership in 2004 and the Governor's Award as S.C. Ambassador of Economic Development in 1995.

Skeet has also helped in uncountable number of veterans who have had problems with their retirement pay, obtaining benefits, or getting into a V.A. facility. Now that he is in his mid-seventies, he says it is time to retire from public life, spend more time with Jean and get back on the river for some fishing and crabbing while he still can.

It is with distinct admiration and privilege that we pause today to recognize Skeet Von Harten and his lifelong commitment to public service.

Beaufort County Broadcast Services is producing a documentary on Skeet and all of his achievements. Tonight, we would like to show a brief excerpt of the video.

(video segment)

Skeet, please join me at the podium.

On behalf of County Council I would like to present you with a card and a framed gavel collage documenting your service to the people of Beaufort County,

On behalf of the South Carolina Association of Counties Board of Directors, I would like to present you with this plaque.

Now, I would ask Senator Tom Davis to come forward for presentation of a very prestigious honor to bestow on you.

(Senator Davis presents the Order of the Palmetto)