

Member news & Notes

Mr. John Hollis, right, talks with Dr. Robert Rescigno of Wilmington University, left, and James DeChene of the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce, center, before his video interview. Students from DelCastle Technical High School recorded and edited footage from the visit for his award video.



John Hollis receives John H. Taylor, Jr. Education Leadership Award

» The Delaware State Chamber of Commerce and its affiliate, The Partnership, Inc., are pleased to present the John H. Taylor, Jr. Education Leadership award to Mr. John Hollis. Mr. Hollis is the founder and director of MERIT – Minority Educational Regional Incentive Training. This prestigious award is presented at the Superstars in Education Reception & Awards Ceremony. This year's event was on Monday, May 14, 2018, at 4:45 p.m., at

Wilmington University.

The John H. Taylor, Jr. Education Leadership Award recognizes someone within the community who has provided sustained leadership in advancing Delaware education and who, by doing so, has also made our community a better place in which to live and work. The Partnership, Inc. is the 501(c)3 education affiliate of the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce.

"It is extremely exciting to honor such

a deserving man – a lifelong and second-generation Delaware educator – who has successfully focused his passion toward the recognition and development of the human capability of young people," said Katie Wilkinson of Fulton Bank, chair of The Partnership, Inc.'s Board of Directors.

In collaboration with a group of engineers from DuPont's Seaford plant in 1974, Mr. Hollis created MERIT to provide academic enrichment and



Former MERIT participant Chelina Tirrell, with Mr. Hollis. Chelina is now a science teacher for the Indian River School District.

college preparatory opportunities for minority students from the Greater-Seaford area, and across Sussex County. It provides challenging engineering experiences, teaches powerful leadership skills, and encourages participants to earn college degrees. To date, 370 MERIT alumni have gone on to achieve a college degree, accounting for approximately 97% of its participants. Many return to volunteer, creating a strong alumni base, which has helped shape the evolution of the program. He encourages parental involvement that he notes is instrumental to success. Mr. Hollis has overseen MERIT for 42 years.

In addition to his work with MERIT, Mr. Hollis was a longtime administrator, teacher and coach in the Seaford School District, and was the Personnel Director for Delaware Technical Community College. He has also served as Senior Vice President of the Delaware Community Foundation, President of the Western Sussex Boys and Girls Club in Delaware, and the Sussex County Manager of Community and Government Affairs at Nemours Health and Prevention Services. He is the founder of Sussex Outdoors, an adjunct faculty member at Wilmington and Salisbury Universities.

“John Hollis looks at the world through a lens of service and humility.

Over decades, hundreds of young people who needed a leg up have been inspired by his passion for engineering and math through the MERIT program. His work has changed countless lives. Supporting children in need is his ministry. He has given his heart to the community and never asked for acknowledgement. I have every confidence that the namesake of this award, John H. Taylor, would have been honored to give him some of that recognition,” said Dr. Paul Herdman, President and CEO of The Rodell Foundation, and chair of the John H. Taylor Education Leadership Award Committee.

Mr. Hollis is a graduate of the University of Delaware and earned a Master’s degree in counseling from Salisbury University. He has received numerous recognitions, including the Jefferson Award for “Outstanding Service by an Entrepreneur,” Connecting Generations’ Robert A. Kasey Lifetime Achievement Award, MLK Community Recognition Award, 2015 Blue/Gold Leadership Award, Rural Educator of the Year Award, Family Focus Award, Governor’s (Gov. Tom Carper) Volunteer of the Year Award, among many others. He was inspired by his father, president of the Seaford Board of Education, who was extraordinarily committed to the community.

Mr. Hollis shares that the key to be a great mentor of young people consists of three E’s: Encouragement, Empathy and Enthusiasm.

“I knew John [Taylor] well. He was one of my heroes, so I couldn’t be more honored,” said Hollis when told he was selected as the award recipient. “This made my day, my month, my year!”

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— *Katie Wilkinson, Sr. Vice President, Delaware Commercial Banking, Fulton Bank*



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— *Dr. Paul Herdman, President & CEO, Rodel Foundation*



“John Hollis is a person that gives of himself, his legacy of what he has done for students will live on forever, a man of humility and kindness. I have been

blessed to know him and have watched

his unwavering commitment and the successes that he has brought to the students of Delaware.”

— *Rob Rescigno, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs, Wilmington University*



“John’s advocacy work has positively impacted Delaware families and youth. His extraordinary investment of time, energy, resources and most importantly his love for

the students in Seaford and throughout our state has been incredible – and his support will be felt for generations to come.”

— *Rick Deadwyler, U.S. Mid-Atlantic/Northeast Region, Government & Industry Affairs, DuPont*

“John has meant the world to me as a teacher, a coach, a mentor and a lifelong friend. He’s been there for me in good times and bad. There are some special people who make a true difference in the lives of others. John has been there for me and so many others and for that, I will always be grateful.”

— *Larry Windley, Senior Director for Projects and Economic Development, Office of U.S. Senator Tom Carper*



“John Hollis has had an enormous impact on our state. From the many youth he coached over the years to all of the people he’s touched through Nemours and his

myriad activities. John has been a leader among leaders in Delaware. He is certainly one of the finest people I have ever met, in part because he is a servant first. He always knows it’s not about him but it’s about those we serve. This award, named for another of Delaware’s great leaders, John Taylor, is incredibly well-deserved.”

— *Jack Markell, Governor of Delaware, 2009-2017*



“John lets his life speak. His work in our community, and on behalf of our children in particular, is a powerful and lasting example of how to turn commitment and

values into action and change.”

— *Jill Rogers, Executive Director, Delaware Guidance Services for Children and Youth, Inc.*

“John Hollis’ leadership and mentoring of young people is his legacy. He has changed the world around him with his passionate advocacy of encouraging higher education for youth across Sussex County. Mr. Hollis is the

example of inspiring youngsters to become future leaders.”

— *Rich Heffron, President Delaware State Chamber of Commerce*



“I have had the extreme honor of knowing both John H. Taylor, Jr. and John Hollis. Both men are individuals



that have the unique ability to impact you for the better by being in their presence. Both men are true to the core value of service to others, especially

those who experience inequities. I met John Hollis back in the early 80s as we were advocating for individuals with intellectual disabilities. John never tires from this core principle of service to others and his passion and energy are endless. He works to advance the health and well-being of all but especially our children and youth. He is the most humble man and is quick to shy away from self-recognition extending the recognition to all that have been blessed to share his journey. Just like our dear friend John Taylor. True leaders, role models and a huge heart that leaves an everlasting hold on your soul. Delaware is a much better place because of these incredible, unique human beings and I am a much better human because of having the privilege to have known and know these men.”

— *Rita Landgraf*
Professor of Practice and Distinguished Health & Social Services Administrator in Residence, University of Delaware College of Health Sciences

“John Hollis is a national treasure and legend. He epitomizes service leadership, personal sacrifice, and exhibits the strongest commitment to developing young people. His efforts have positively impacted thousands of students and families over the decades. One can only imagine how different



many students’ trajectories would be without the opportunity to cross paths with John Hollis: we would have fewer college graduates, state

champions, doctors, engineers, nurses, businesswomen, executives, lawyers, teachers, principals, professors, bankers, policemen, volunteers, and many other vocations. But most importantly John encourages the development of great human beings and leaders who “pay it forward” and impact their chosen communities in wonderful ways beyond measure. In this sense, John’s impact is not limited by geography, generation, class, race, or creed. He reflects the highest ideals of our communities, country, and society. It is an honor and privilege to know him.”

— *Omar Scott Simmons*
Howard L. Oleck Professor of Business Law and Director, Business Law Program Wake Forest University School of Law - Worrell Professional Center



I can’t think of an individual more deserving of the John H. Taylor Education Leadership Award than John Hollis. The impact that he has made on the lives of

everyone that he has come in contact with is immeasurable. With a character that is above reproach, his legacy is sure to endure through the ages.

— *Chelina Tirrell, STEM Teacher Selbyville Middle School*

“It’s the care for the community that Mr. John Hollis has demonstrated through his work at MERIT that makes our nation truly great. Thank you, Mr. Hollis, for your commitment and for investing in future generations.”

— *Dr. Ben Carson*
Secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and Development



ABOUT THE JOHN H. TAYLOR, JR. LEADERSHIP AWARD

Throughout his professional career, Mr. Taylor was an educator. He began his career as a teacher, then served as the assistant to the superintendent of the Wilmington Public Schools. Taylor’s education background, coupled with his ability to share information and make connections, served him well as he rose to become editorial page editor for The News Journal before becoming president of the Delaware Public Policy Institute in 2005. As founding member of the Vision Coalition, Taylor’s leadership and directness were instrumental in building an impactful public-private partnership to advocate for improved education in Delaware. Taylor’s leadership style was always straightforward, clear-headed and unwavering. At the same time, he was a humorous and truly humble man.