

## 2024 Citation for Long and Valued Service to the Assembly

### Steve Walton, Mark Walton, Hugh Walton, and Julie Pray Walton– August 2024

It can't be said too often – when we try to describe the Congregational Summer Assembly to those who don't know it we may mention the woods, the beautiful lakes, the beaches, and the role of the Meeting House. But finally, it's always the people, the relationships, the commitment to the community that we try to communicate. Often, we find ourselves struggling for words to express this special spirit of voluntarism that is at the heart of everything we do here. But this morning the Citation Committee is celebrating part of a large extended family so known for their service to the Assembly that simply mentioning them is enough to bring a nod and "Oh, now I see." Here, selected in their own right for their ongoing work on behalf of the Assembly, but firmly representing all those others in their family are Steve, Mark, Hugh, and Julie Pray Walton.

There is a little backstory to this Citation that illustrates who they are. Through a few generations the extension of the Walton family has come to be the Walton/Dertz/Patterson/Pray family. All of them are living out the legacy of training by parents, grandparents, and CSA role models to give back to their communities and especially to help here at the Assembly. Any one of them could easily have received the Citation as an individual. Every one of them who was suggested refused to be singled out. Then, after the entire extended family was selected to receive the Citation the other branches of the family said "No, it should be these four..." to represent them and also the many hundreds of other volunteers who work in front of and behind the scenes to keep both the spirit and the physical space of the Assembly vibrant and alive.



Steve, Mark, Hugh, Julie Pray Walton

It's no surprise that each of these four will notice something that needs to be done, and then set about finding a way to do it. They come by this honestly as both Elsie and Bob Walton (in 1996) and Lou Pray (in 2002) received the Citation for Long and Valued Service to the Assembly. This had a great impact on their children, and these were some of the same qualities noted about the parents.

There have been group projects that all of them along with others in the extended family worked on. The rafts and the lifeguard stands in Crystal Lake were built by them. Before I single out some of their individual contributions here are a few of the many ways Assembly life has been notably enhanced by their volunteer efforts: providing off season grounds keeping; providing year-round

maintenance and repair; helping with Art Fair parking, set up, and clean up; helping with off season cleaning, painting, and waterfront needs; teaching Sunday School; chaperoning youth activities - and they can account for a total of 150 years of singing in the choir!

Collectively they do significant things for the community and for the Assembly. When Bob and Elsie Walton had 5 boys anyone might have thought that was a handful. Bob believed that boys needed work so that's what they did. Here at the Assembly, he took them to Tom Williams and then to Jim Buzzell and said "Find them something to do." If you knew Tom and Jim you know they had no trouble responding to that!

But we can't forget that they are individuals as well with totally different career trajectories and with individual contributions to the Assembly as well.

Steve taught high school history in Stirling, IL, where he also coached football and track for 35 years and basketball for a dozen. He was named to the Stirling Athletic Hall of Fame as a coach. After retiring 17 years ago he became a full-time volunteer. In the larger community he volunteers with Meals on Wheels, tutoring, the Swim Academy, and Rotary. Here at the Assembly, in the offseason when there is no paid maintenance staff, you'll see Steve out there mowing the ballfield regularly – spring and fall. And in the fall, he is continually clearing leaves from the tennis courts which is an ongoing task on the woods courts. Steve stresses that now that Mark is here, he also clears leaves.

Mark is a hydrologist who spent 31 years with the National Weather Service, a branch of NOAA – the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. His work in hydrology included all flooding and flash flooding occurrences in Michigan. He says he

always tied his job to access to Crystal Lake, so every new job brought him closer until he retired 10 years ago in Grand Rapids where he's been a deacon at his church for 23 years. Here at the Assembly, it is Mark who goes into Crystal Lake in the spring to put out the lifelines and the boat moorings, and he's the one who goes back into the lake after the season is over to take all those things out.

Hugh was the youngest. He worked for Jim Buzzell in maintenance and at the Crystal View. After college he went East and worked at a bank and he was going to be starting grad school when he developed leukemia. He doesn't talk about it much except to say that it brought him here full time. He started working at Crystal Mountain in 1995 and is still working there. Unlike the others, Hugh is mostly at the Assembly in the off season and in that period exemplifies the attitude of walking around and seeing if something needs to be done, then doing it. He used to be the one who got the fall leaves off the tennis courts, now leaving that to Steve and Mark – because his big event every year is the “burn pile!” All during the year he pulls branches and fallen trees off the roads and paths and out of vulnerable places in the woods. Then on just the right late winter day when there is no wind but still snow on the ground, he and his CSA friends set it on fire. A good burn pile will flame 50 feet high or more, and people come from far and wide to see it.

Julie joined the family bringing with her the Pray family history of service and voluntarism which has always been a powerful influence on her and her brother. She grew up seeing her parents engaged in service so it was always part of her life. She earned her Ph.D. in Exercise Physiology and Public Health at the University of Maryland and was Professor of Exercise Physiology and Nutrition at Calvin University for 16 years. In 2014 Julie received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching, and she retired in 2015 as Professor Emerita. At the Assembly Julie served as Secretary of the Women's Association and as Secretary of the Board of Trustees. She is a regular member of the Bible Studies group that meets weekly during the summer.

Julie and Mark grew up together here. Their parents and grandparents were good friends and all the kids spent their summers together. Mark and Julie went to different colleges and came to realize that they weren't meeting anyone they liked nearly as much as they liked each other – so why not get married? Thus, uniting two of the Assembly's great service-oriented families.

We thank you – Steve, Mark, Hugh, and Julie. You learned from impressive role models, and you are awesome role models yourself.

On behalf of the four of you I'd like to ask all those in the Walton/Dertz/Patterson/Pray extended family to stand because the legacy of service is seen in all of you.