

# Louisville's Jim Edwards gets Gold Key Award at United Way awards breakfast

By LAURIE HUFFMAN

*The Review*

Jim Edwards of Louisville was recognized with a Gold Key Service Award at the 2010 United Way annual meeting and awards breakfast held on Wednesday at the Kent State University Stark Campus Center in Canton, also called the organization's "Day of Thanks."

Scott Zurakowski, chairman of the board of United Way of Greater Stark County, and Maria Heege, president and CEO, presented Edwards his award, which they said is one of the highlights of the annual event.

Since 1961, United Way has recognized community leaders and volunteers for the impact that they have made on the Stark County community through the Gold Key awards, given to recognize those who have continually demonstrated "the highest degree of personal dedication and service in a voluntary capacity" to the United Way or its service providers.

Edwards, an American Red Cross volunteer since 1999, was nominated for the award by Jacquie Batchelder, development director at the American Red Cross Stark County Chapter.

"Jim Edwards is the definition of an active volunteer with the American Red Cross, both with the Stark County chapter and as a national disaster volunteer," said Heege and Zurakowski during the presentation. "Since 1999, Jim has been involved with the disaster response program. The list of assignments he has enthusiastically undertaken is long and impressive."

During an interview on Tuesday, Edwards reported his last national Red Cross mission was in June of 2008 when he helped flood victims in Iowa. He also went down to give aid in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina and has been back there four times on rebuilding missions since the area was initially hit. He is planning to go down again on April 11.

Edwards usually works from one of the Red Cross feeding trucks, which dispense food prepared by the Southern Baptist Convention. "They cook 95 percent of the meals the Red Cross delivers," Edwards said. "The Red Cross buys the food, and about 30 older Baptists come down to cook it. They are very experienced, and they know what they're doing. They work 15- to 16-hour days and stay for three days, then 30 more Baptists come to relieve them."

Edwards said the disaster volunteer crews he is a part of work 13-hour days for 21-day missions.

In Iowa, he was assigned a different type of aid and worked from one of the Red Cross emergency response vehicles, sent to give disaster victims cleanup supplies such as shovels, bleach, disinfectant, masks, gloves, brooms, etc. "These are supplies people need when they are

gutting their homes after a flood,” Edwards explained. “The flood waters are always down before we come in because the Red Cross won’t put us in harm’s way.”

Edwards and his wife, Mary, went on their first national Red Cross mission in 1999, after he retired as owner/operator of a car dealership in Louisville. They were sent to help during Hurricane Floyd in North Carolina on that solo mission. It was a good experience, but he said his wife no longer goes along on the national missions. She volunteers locally for the Red Cross at Aultman Hospital each week, he added, and has been doing that for the past 14 years.

During Hurricane Katrina, Edwards recalls there were 10,000 Red Cross volunteers on his mission, with about 30 percent handling feeding and mass care and the other two-thirds working in family services, interviewing people to find out their needs and give them cash, vouchers for lodging and clothing and other referrals.

Edwards has been on 14 national assignments and has responded to countless local disasters. He has also been a member of the board of directors representing the local disaster program and served a term as the Stark County representative to the Northern Ohio Blood Region.

“Most disasters happen in the dark of the night, rousing volunteers from their sleep to serve. Jim’s willingness to help allows the Red Cross to be there when families and individuals experience total loss,” Heege and Zurakowski said while reading the nomination letter from Batchelder, director of the Stark County Red Cross chapter. “Jim’s energy, enthusiasm and always-cheerful nature is a perfect fit for the hard work of serving those affected by a disaster,” Batchelder’s letter also said.

Two other individuals, Dr. Mona Shay, director of medical education at Affinity Medical Center, and Mack Smith, board chair of the Greater Stark County Urban League, were also given Gold Key Service Awards during the Wednesday event.