

Gavel Club History

The Gavel Club's Perpetual Achievement Award was conceived during the Presidents' Cocktail Hour at the 1974 Los Angeles Convention. Initially the award was to be a trophy for the "Dance of Champions" contest and presented annually at convention. Valley Gavel Club members Darrell Norton and Ray Jewett were elected to create the award. Within the week following convention L.A. Gavel Club member Ray Bradford who could not attend the meeting because of convention duties said, "Rather than have another trophy for another dance category, let's do something for the rest of the N.S.D." Darrell Norton and Ray Jewett presented the Gavel Achievement Award idea. This was to be a very special recognition to a very special member for outstanding service to the organization. The Gavel Club members approved wholeheartedly. Unfortunately Darrell Norton passed on before the dream became a reality.

Carl Koehler, a prominent trophy manufacturer, received the order to create the award. Upon delivery it exceeded all expectations. This was truly the most beautiful of all trophies and expressed the true meaning and high ideals of N.S.D. What a compliment to pay a member! Whoever won this award could be justly proud because he or she was the choice of the Gavel Club Members.

The rules were established and announced. "The candidate for the Presidents' Gavel Award must be a member in good standing and have performed outstanding service to the organization." The rules were simple enough, but when you started selecting possible candidates the field narrowed. Valley Gavel Club member Jack Dunlap, nominated in 1976 and 1977 said, "Just to be nominated is an honor." Ray Jewett now asked Ray Basaillon to take Darrell Norton's vacant position and chair the Award Selection Committee, while he assumed the duties of Recording/Corresponding Secretary, Treasurer, Historian and Trophy Chairman.

Many excellent letters of nomination were received. The first Gavel Award was presented at the 1975 San Jose Convention. A tie existed between Queen Mother Betty Mack and Ray Jewett. After thanking the Gavel Club members for their consideration, Ray withdrew in favor of Betty Mack. She was overwhelmed. The idea caught on and more letters arrived lauding the merits of outstanding members.

The next member to be honored for outstanding service was our Home Office Secretary Virginia Crawford. Her astonishment was so complete all she could say was, "Thank you!"

At the 1976 Presidents' Cocktail Party, twice nominated Ray Bradford, who had just entertained at the Crown Circle Brunch, was heard to say, "Boy! We should have a brunch. The Crown Circle sure has a good time." Jack Kessler and Ray Jewett set it up. Over fifty (50) members attended the first Gavel Club Brunch at the 1977 San Francisco Convention.

A new method of presenting the Gavel Award candidate was introduced. All letters and a voting ballot were placed in a folder. Each of the Gavel Club members received a folder prior to the brunch. This gave the membership time to study the qualifications of each candidate.

At the Farewell Breakfast Ray Basaillon presented the Gavel Club's 1977 Achievement Award to Gomp DeMilo. Had anyone ever seen Gino at a loss for words? With tears in his eyes and an emotion choked voice, all he could say was "Thank you!" Three wonderful people had received this award and three people had been speechless. May it always be so!

In January 1978 Ray Jewett was once again approached by a number of Gavel Club members with two excellent suggestions”

1. Invite the reigning presidents to attend the Gavel Brunch and to also participate in the selection for the Gavel Award.
2. Only Gavel membership (including reigning presidents) attending the brunch, be allowed to nominate candidates for the award. Any member who wishes to nominate a candidate for the Award will be allowed a three (3) minute nominating speech. [See Gavel Club Rules #4, for current nominating procedures.] All nominations and voting to take place in a closed session and by secret ballot.

Since the Gavel Club is always open to any suggestion from the membership, these two suggestions were adopted for 1978.

The Gavel Award is now part of N.S.D.'s great tradition. It is the highest of awards and can only be earned by performing outstanding service to the National Smooth Dancers, Inc. The ordinary functions that many perform, while not unimportant, are not the criteria for the Gavel Award. We expect members of N.S.D. to carry out the responsibilities they accept when they volunteer to serve as chapter officers or on chapter committees. Great dancing or being a Charter Member is not a requirement or criterion. The Gavel Club is searching for that very special member who is dedicated to the ideals and traditions of N.S.D. and does not recognize chapter boundaries.

We have such members and the Gavel Club wishes to honor these cherished members. (See the Honor Roll elsewhere in this program.)

The Gavel Club Award is the Presidents' way of saying "THANK YOU!" to an esteemed National Smooth Dancers member.