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"Jack Hardin is the quiet man in Atlanta who has been effective, diligent and determined over so many years in dealing with the problem of homelessness, indigent defense, health care for the needy and so forth," said Emmet J. Bondurant. "He has never sought credit or the limelight for [his service]. He has been the quiet man for which the community depends on so much of its progress."

Attorney Edward J. "Jack" Hardin, an advocate and leader in efforts to protect and enable homeless and poverty-stricken people for decades, received the Ben F. Johnson Jr. Public Service Award on May 3 at Georgia State University College of Law.

Hardin is the co-founder and co-chair of Gateway Center and a founding partner at Rogers & Hardin. The Gateway Center, which works to end



Dean Wendy F. Hensel (left) presents Edward J. "Jack" Hardin the 2018 Ben F. Johnson Jr. Public Service Award.

homelessness in metro Atlanta through therapeutic programs and community collaboration, has served more than 35,000 individuals since opening in 2005. The center was established as part of an effort to combat homelessness after then-Mayor Shirley Franklin asked the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta to study the issue and provide recommendations in 2002.

"We got a lot of attention nationally because we were going to convert a jail into a center that would serve people's needs and would not function as a place of imprisonment but rather one of freedom and access," Franklin said. "I'm not sure that would have worked had we not had Jack in charge; he has a way about him. [The Gateway Center] has sustained over time in large part because of Jack's leadership."

Franklin said the number of people homeless on the annual count has been falling since Hardin's leadership. "That's not because we are giving them bus tickets to go somewhere else—some cities do that. It's because Jack was able to knit together the services and the opportunities for people that allowed them to transition to a more normal lifestyle. Had he not brought this tenacity and persistence and determination, Atlanta would have scores more people living on the streets."

Because of their success, Atlanta became a model for other cities nationwide. "The magic is people like Jack who didn't give up," Franklin said. "Because of his character, his approach and his credibility, people believed him. Thousands of people have been impacted by Jack's leadership—well over 35,000 that we can count directly. That's a huge impact on a city like Atlanta."

Charles H. "Pete" McTier said Hardin's service comes from the heart. "I've known no one that has spent more time at community service than Jack. The array of institutions that he has been involved in—it's extraordinary. He doesn't just serve, he becomes chair of the board," McTier said. "He's there, he's going to stay with it and that's so important to its success."

In accepting the award, Hardin thanked those who have served with him. "This is all about what several hundred agencies and several thousand people have accomplished, who are out there every day with low pay, providing help to people who are mentally disabled, have substance abuse histories, have criminal records, all kinds of other burdens imposed on them by unjust problems," Hardin said. "We have achieved a lot in Atlanta, we have reduced all categories of homelessness in the last seven or eight years and we've done it because of those people and because of the public will."

Hardin said the goal is to get to a point where homelessness in Atlanta is rare, brief and non-recurring—but the fight won't end there.

"We have a strategy, we have a fund, we are beginning to implement it," he said. "But if we do all that, that won't be enough, because we need a community of economic justice. We need a community where people can earn a living sufficient to pay the cost of housing and take care of themselves. So that means we have to attack the drastic lack of affordable housing—that's the next job."

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