

April 25, 2012

BROWNELL HONORED AS “HERO FOR THE HOMELESS”

DES MOINES – Polk County Supervisor Bob Brownell was honored as a “Hero for the Homeless” this evening by the Central Iowa Shelter & Services organization at an award dinner at the Temple for the Performing Arts.

In addition to Brownell, CISS honored William C. Knapp and Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino. Prairie Meadows was recognized as a leading sponsor of community programs and organizations including Central Iowa Shelter & Services. Knapp was honored as an entrepreneur and philanthropist who started with nothing but became one of the most-successful businessmen in Iowa history. He has played an integral role in fundraising for CISS’ current facility when it was built in 1995.

Brownell, a former Clive councilman and mayor, was elected to the board of supervisors in 2000 and is serving his third term. Seeking his fourth term this year, Brownell has gone undercover and entered CISS to better understand homelessness in central Iowa.

Here is the text of his acceptance remarks:

“Words are important. When they first called me and told me I had won a “Homeless Heroes” award, I thought, sweet. I’m neither.

“I’m not homeless and I’m not a hero. Then they said, no, it’s a “Hero for the Homeless” award.

“That made more sense.

“But I’m not deserving of the label, even then.

“I need to make some introductions; first my lovely wife, Jenna. She puts up with all my escapades. Love for so many things, but for that, too. My son and daughter in law, Kevin and Maria Brownell. They’re both attorneys here in Des Moines. I also would like to introduce a member of our Polk County family; David Jones, our County Manager.

“I get the following question a lot: “Why do you care about homeless people so much?”

“That question is usually accompanied, very quickly, by this interrogative: “Aren’t you a Republican?”

“Yes. I am.

“Let me tell you, some of the most generous and compassionate people I know are Republicans.

Some of the most generous and compassionate people I know are Democrats.

“Passion, empathy, and compassion have no affiliations. They’re not bound by party membership. We think they are, but they’re not. We’re connected by our passions.

“We are fed these stereotypes by our informational and entertainment media for this reason: laziness. To label huge groups of people with absurd characterizations can only mean one thing: intellectual laziness. It’s easier to make sense of the world if we can generalize people into easy-to-understand boxes.

“The problem is, we accept the stereotypes for the same reason: laziness. Thus the process continues and so does the stereotyping. So it is with the homeless. I’m guilty of it. When I went to spend time at the homeless shelter, I went to West Des Moines Human Services...and my friends from West Des Moines are here tonight; Sue

Patterson-Nielson and Carol Bodin...and Sue gave me a beat up coat to go with my raggedy clothes.

"It was an Armani coat, of course. West Des Moines, people. See? That's a stereotype. No, it wasn't really an Armani. It was a beater. I had grown a beard and had worn ragged clothes. That was my best impression of a homeless guy. It also gave me the distinction of being the worst looking and worst dressed person in the homeless shelter.

"Interesting.

"They don't really look like that. It's just our stereotype. But, anyone can help other people. Just break some stereotypes. Come on in and help.

"The second thing is: Jesus said, Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Quench the thirst of those that are thirsty. He didn't say, 'Do it when you get some time.' Or, 'Do it when you can fit it in.' Or, 'Make sure you do it in election years.' He just said, 'Do it.' Period.

"People say, well, Bob, aren't you worried about "enabling" people into homelessness?

"Yeah, I worry about that. Who doesn't? We've all seen it, too. We offer with one hand, a free gift to a person, then take that person's human dignity with the other.

"But I think the first thing to do is to help. Help first.

"Our objective should be to offer help so that people can be allowed to stand up and quench their own thirst...without government help or handouts.

"Help will make a difference.

"I am so happy that the new Shelter is nearing completion. It will be a huge step to accomplishing the help people need to stand on their own two feet without the assistance of anyone.

"Thanks for the award. I am truly honored. Thanks everyone!"