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Men honored for commitment to fatherhood, community

Urban Light Ministries' largest class numbers 23 at recent ceremony.

By Kermit Rowe
Contributing Writer

Good fathers come in all shapes and sizes, a fact that was never clearer than at Urban Light Ministries' annual Community Fatherhood Awards presentation recently at COhatch The Market. A class of 23 fathers were honored.

"It was really gratifying to have such a large awards class this

year," said ULM founder and CEO Eli Williams. "This was our largest class by far.

"That speaks well about the future of our community, because an actively engaged mature and responsive father in partnership with their children's mother form the foundation of any society," he said. "It is imperative that the whole community embraces support and celebrates the institution of fatherhood."

The awards have been presented at the annual Juneteenth FatherFest celebration, but the event was canceled due to the

COVID-19 pandemic. So ULM presented an alternative in order to still honor some of the community's most successful dads.

Criteria used to select the winners included demonstrating an outstanding commitment to raising their children, being an exemplary father, an inspiring role model who has triumphed over adversity, contributes to the development and well-being of children in the community, and provides significant leadership and inspiration to other fathers.

Fathers continued on B4



Urban Light Ministries CEO Eli Williams (left) congratulates James Wallace, one of 23 Community Fatherhood Award winners, at a ceremony June 20 at COhatch The Market. CONTRIBUTED

Fathers

continued from B1

Vineyard of Northridge Pastor Neil Haney, one of the award winners, spoke on fatherhood's importance.

"Being a father has been the greatest privilege of my life," he said. "Besides my own children, I have lots of spiritual children I have invested in and I have grown very close to. I think it is important to be a father to as many children as we can."

Williams echoed those sentiments.

"The aim of the award is to recognize fathers who play a vital role in the lives of their children," he said. "Even a man with no biological children can be a great father."

James Wallace placed fatherhood just below his walk with God.

"I've got three beautiful children and being a father has probably been No. 1 in my life," said Wallace. "Well, Christ Jesus is obviously No. 1-A. But 1-B is being a father. When you understand the importance of being responsible and loving people, then you can give it to all you come across. Then you are a father to all people."

Jon Devien Upshaw is an example of being a father.

"My dad was a part-time dad and now that I am a father, I see that being a part-time dad doesn't cut it," he said. "All the programs I've gone through at Urban Light, from Son-



Shown are 14 of the 23 Community Fatherhood Award winners honored at a ceremony June 20 at COhatch The Market. CONTRIBUTED

COMMUNITY FATHERHOOD AWARDS

Community Fatherhood Awards

Living Legends Award (over 35 years old)

Charles Michael Ambruske, Lorenzo Anderson, Joe Bair, Michael Bruns, Shawn Carpenter, Timothy Elliott, Paul Grandinette, John Greene, Neil Haney, Colin Inglis, John Krichbaum, Kevin Moehn, Gavin Patch, J.J. Peck, Walter B. Sanford Jr., Gary Severt, Blake Shaffer, Mark Sturgeon, James Wallace, Steve White

Young Dad Award (under 35)

Javontae Casey, Dustin Estridge, Jon Devien Upshaw

shine Club to the fatherhood training, helps me be a better dad. And the direction of the Lord, of course. It feels good to be recognized."

Recognition should include the awareness

of a great responsibility, said award-winner Charles Michael Ambruske.

"Fatherhood is a huge responsibility," said Ambruske. "I look at it like it is our responsibility. Taking care of the kids and the

wife, it's a responsibility but not a load."

What do you say to a father who is thinking about growing his relationship with his children?

"First of all, just hang in there," said Ambruske. "Find a core of people who can support you and continue to learn all you can."

Then find a good role model.

"I'm just trying to emulate our Father God, trying to be loving and compassionate," said award-winner Steve White. "We have a good model and I try to follow Him as best as we can. Thank God we are forgiven when we mess up."