



C & J Sweeping's Ray Confer Integral to Community



Ray Confer has been a sweeping company operator for almost 40 years. He is the owner of C & J Parking Lot Sweeping, which is located in Warren, Michigan. Confer was recently awarded a very special certificate of achievement – what amounts to a lifetime achievement award – by the Governor of Michigan. Volunteerism is a large part of how Ray Confer runs his business and his life.

For this WSA Contractor Profile I asked Ray, shown to the left, to talk about how he has conducted himself in business through the years with an emphasis on the kinds of personal involvement he has gotten into for his community. Ray is also a member of the Advisory Board of the World Sweeping Association.



by Ranger Kidwell-Ross, Executive Director, World Sweeping Association

WSA: Ray, thanks for joining with me here today to talk about your community involvement, as well as your outstanding company, C & J Parking Lot Sweeping and Maintenance. I look forward to hearing from you directly about the kinds of things you're involved with in your greater community in Warren, Michigan. First off, what type of organizations do you work with there?

RC: Thank you, Ranger, I really appreciate it. I've been a member of the Shelby Township Lions Club for 30 years. We do fundraisers that support Leader Dogs for the Blind as well as other charities. I'm chairman of two of our big events and co-chair of the third one. We raise quite a bit of money for Leader Dogs.

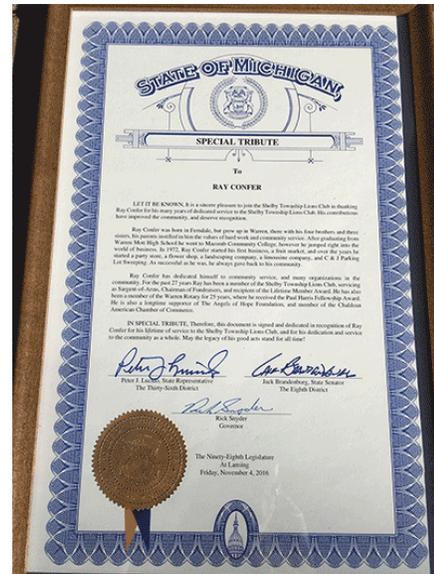


On November 4th of this year (2016) we had a wine, liquor and beer tasting event that took up four wedding halls. We had 900 people who attended and it was a great charity event. Attendees included all kinds of celebrities, including congressmen and judges. I try to give back to the community, where I live and what I do, and that was one of the ways that I could do it – by putting my time (which is a lot of time!) to put these functions on, to raise money for our charity work.

The night of any event where I'm the coordinator, everybody has a good time except me: I'm working away and trying to get everything situated, so everybody else can have a good time! One of the points I'd like to emphasize is the importance of having classy events. For example, at this most recent one we had wine-tasting along with a live 'music festival.' We had top-notch bands that played Journey, Doors, Rolling Stones; music that people have heard and like. I also coordinated a boxing night, where we had around 700 people. My involvement in these types of events are ways I can help to give back to my community.

WSA: I know that you've been somewhat involved with this sort of thing for 30 years, but have you become more involved in community activities in the last decade or so, or how did that grow? I know a lot of people in business think: "Well, should I join the Lions, or should I join the Rotary, or should I join the Kiwanis?..."

Then, with whichever they join, many don't end up actually going to the meetings; oftentimes, they just want to put that on the logo onto their company's letterhead. Doing that is not nearly as effective in terms of helping the community, for one, but in my experience it also doesn't do much to help a business get a better profile. What are your comments on that?



RC: Speaking for what I do, I definitely go into my volunteerism with a goal of helping the community, to give back to the community. I go to all the meetings and I get involved. I try to figure how we can do our events, how we can raise money. I'm pretty good at marketing the events and organizing them. I can train the guys that don't know what to do, help them out, and just, it's a sense of giving back to the community. That's what I do. I'm also in the Rotary, the Fraternal Order of Police and the Sheriff's Department Auxiliary; it goes on and on with different things that I do. And, because I'm good at what I do and I like what I do, I meet a lot of different people. The business comes afterwards. I don't go for the business first. I give first and everything else follows.

WSA: Well, I think that's certainly a good approach and philosophy to have. This recent Special Tribute Certificate: Did you know it was coming? It's pretty impressive to get a special tribute presented to you, but how wonderful to have it signed by your State Representative and your State Senator, as well as Rick Snyder, the Governor of Michigan. How did it evolve that you were provided with that tribute?



RC: That Certificate was a total surprise! I had not a clue that it was coming my way. I always provide some sort of tribute on the night of events I coordinate. These might go to a Judge or someone else that works in our community. This time, after I gave out my award, our State Representative came up and said there was a special award they'd like to introduce to the people at the event. I had no clue this was coming my way and was totally shocked!"

Editor's Note: If you want to see the 1.5-minute video of Ray receiving his award, the Tiny URL link is: <http://tinyurl.com/jpjztj6>

Confer was also designated 'Man of the Year' for his philanthropic efforts by his local hospital. That title was conferred on him in front of 700 attendees at the Henry Ford Hospital's \$250/plate dinner.

In 2016 Confer also received an award for the community where he lives – Shelby Township – for making the community a better place to live. That award was given by the Shelby Township City Council. In his typical modest fashion, Confer's response to getting so many significant awards in just one year: "Believe me when I say that I don't look for awards for what I do; they just pop up."

WSA: I want to also include some information about how you've grown your business, as well. How long have you been in operation as C & J Parking Lot Sweeping?

RC: Pretty close to 40 years. I started in 1978 with one truck; now I have 45-50 vehicles.



WSA: And you do parking lot sweeping and street sweeping, construction sweeping – you do really whatever a client needs to be done?

RC: Yes, we specialize in handling whatever issues a client might have. In addition to all types of sweeping we do a lot of power washing. I have five units just for power washing parking decks. Our goal is to be a one-stop shop. People like to be able to deal with one person so whatever it is we just get it done for our customers. [For the work we sub out] if the job's done right I get paid and then I pay my supplier.

WSA: Talk a little bit in terms of the sweeping itself. What kind of company have you grown into? How did you decide to develop C & J? You must have a strong management team in place, one that can handle your day-to-day operations, in order for you to have the opportunity to work with your community as much as you do. Is that what frees you up to do the marketing for your company as well as these external kinds of highly visible work efforts that really bring so much to your community?

RC: You know, I do have a great team here at C & J. And, I have to thank my wife, Wendy, for letting me do all this stuff that takes time away from my house. What really allows me the freedom to be so community involved, though, is my management team. They can cover me because C & J is a well-oiled machine!

When I take time away I don't have to worry about it. I go and focus 100% on the function of doing for the good of the community without having to worry about the company. My initial job was to put a great staff together and now it's keeping them happy and just having a good working relationship with them.

On that topic, about half of my employees came to this year's wine tasting. I had a couple of tables there for them. I thought it might be valuable just to show what I do out in the community and they were quite shocked when they saw the awards that took place. They had not a clue of all the stuff I do for others. Since then, each one has given me a five-minute lecture on how proud they were.



WSA: Well, that certainly speaks well for your employee group as well, you know.

RC: Oh, absolutely! We run a very personal business. It's amazing how many customers come up and you can hug them. When you have a relationship with people you do business with then it's more of a personal thing [to make sure everything is done right].

What we're talking about is respect. That's how I run my business and that's how I'm glad a lot of my customers run their businesses.

I know the value of creating positive customer experiences. Mommy and daddy didn't give me anything; I've been out there with only one truck, by myself, sweeping. This company was built as I went along.

Growing anything you do is important. When I took up the responsibility for the wine-tasting event at our Lions' Club the average attendance was 135 people. I took it from 135 to 900 people. There's a big difference in what we can support when you go from 135 to 900 people.

WSA: There's a lot more revenue for the community, spread out into the community.

RC: It's all in marketing and in making it a class-act event. And, I concentrate on doing the same with my business. When you market right and you provide good service, business will come your way and stay with you.

I encourage everybody reading this to just go do your very best; do what you know is right and you'll more than survive. Treat your customers well, as well as your health. When you do, you'll find that work will be easy for you.

WSA: Having known you going on 30 years myself, I can understand why you'd get this tribute from the State of Michigan. You are somebody that gives back in every way you can and it's a very admirable trait. I'm proud that we're friends as well as that you are part of the World Sweeping Association's Advisory Board.

FOUNDING MEMBER



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ASSOCIATION
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Ray Confer's C & J Parking Lot Sweeping may be reached by calling (586) 759-3668 (out-of-area call toll free, (888) 568-7933. The company's website is www.cjsweep.com.



