**2021 Kentucky League of Cities (KLC) LEAD Award Recipients**

The Kentucky League of Cities Leadership Enrichment and Development (LEAD) Award recognizes Kentucky mayors whose leadership demonstrates passion for local public service and commitment to lifelong learning. The scholarship award provides financial assistance for Kentucky League of Cities (KLC) conferences and learning events.

**2021 LEAD Award Recipients:

Mayor Rita Dotson, City of Benton**
Mayor Dotson is not a mayor who sits behind a desk. She is out in her city every day, assessing anything that may need attention and listening to her constituents. Mayor Dotson and her own family often go above and beyond, cleaning snowy driveways and delivering groceries when needed. It is this attention to detail and neighborly approach that endeared Mayor Dotson to those she serves. Beyond her “people-centered” style, she takes the duties and requirements of mayor very seriously. Mayor Dotson is a small business owner, supports local service organizations, and is inclusive in listening to all sides of issues. She insists on communication and keeps citizens apprised of government operations. Mayor Dotson has accomplished many city improvements, including vital city services such as trash pick-up, clean-up and other critical ordinances, infrastructure improvements, and ongoing street maintenance. She searches and applies for grants and has recently led the city’s community comprehensive and strategic planning endeavors, setting the path for Benton’s future.  She understands the value of training and utilizes KLC and other resources to stay informed for her city, always eager to bring information and bold ideas to Benton.

**Mayor Sidney Gullion, City of Sparta**A city of family, friends, and neighbors, a close community that helps one another, is what has kept Mayor Sidney Gullion committed as Sparta’s mayor for 20 years. He said, “I always keep looking ahead in the future for opportunities to grow our community and offer resources to bridge gaps for our families and businesses.” Mayor Gullion makes an effort to stay involved and listen to members of the community both informally as well as with more formal brainstorming and meeting settings to know what constituents are thinking. He also embraces collaboration, inviting county leaders, such as the judge-executive and magistrates, to be part of city meetings, so leaders are on the same page. Key issues for the mayor currently include making an effort to get everyone on the same page for big initiatives in the city such as community-wide broadband, wisely utilizing the city’s ARPA funds, improving infrastructure, and leveraging the city’s growth and impact as a tourism destination. Mayor Gullion is committed to continuing education and wants to stay current to help further engage residents and meet the needs of Sparta.

**Mayor Rick Nelson, City of Middlesboro**Mayor Rick Nelson’s connection to his city goes back decades. His commitment has only grown since coming to Middlesboro in 1977 and serving the community as a career educator. Now, as mayor, he calls Middlesboro not only home but the “Magic City” for all its charm and uniqueness. The reality for many cities is they must change. With the decline in the coal industry, people need new careers and a new perspective. Mayor Nelson is committed to creating a community of opportunity and a plan for future generations. He has brought the city from a $750,000 deficit to a $500,000 surplus, focused on training for first responders and police, and successfully obtained new vehicles and equipment grants. The city is also investing in quality-of-life improvements such as parks, playgrounds, and sidewalks. Through careful planning, the mayor included a 5% pay raise for employees in the city’s current budget. In his role as an encourager and team leader, Mayor Rick Nelson is proud of his city employees and leadership staff and gives them much of the credit for the good changes happening in the Magic City.

The LEAD Award is named in honor and memory of Ann Cline Deatherage, a lifelong public servant who served as council member and mayor of the City of Carrollton. After her passing in February 2020, her family wished to create an award through KLC to honor her legacy, and the Mayor Ann C. Deatherage LEAD Award was established. The Deatherage family endowed the award that is sponsored by Enterprise Fleet Management, a KLC Cornerstone Partner company.

