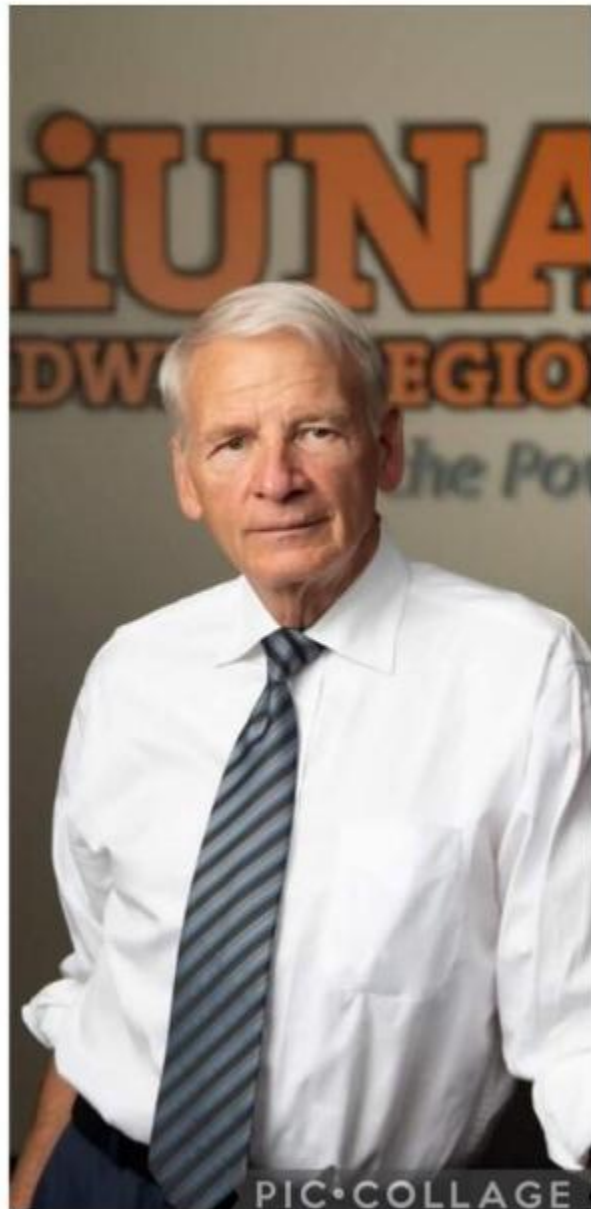


Democratic County Chairs Announce 2021 Party Builder Honorees

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SPRINGFIELD - In 2017 the Illinois Democratic County Chairs' Association (IDCCA) established a Party Builder Award to recognize individuals who have dedicated their lives to growing the Democratic Party throughout Illinois.

Today, the IDCCA is proud to recognize Barb Brown and John Penn as the 2021 Party Builder Award Honorees for their grassroots efforts in building the Democratic Party. IDCCA President Kristina Zahorik released the following statement:

“We are proud to recognize Barb Brown and John Penn for their work strengthening the Democratic Party at the grassroots level. Their unwavering commitments to empowering everyday Illinoisans are shining examples of how politics can -- and does -- change lives. They expanded the influence of the Democratic Party across our state and played critical roles in shaping Illinois into the progressive, pro-union state it is today. Barb and John are giants of Illinois Democratic politics, and it is truly an honor to recognize them for their decades of service.”

The Honorable **Barb Brown** was the former Vice Chair of the Democratic Party of Illinois and the former County Chair of the Randolph County Democratic Party.

She was the first in her family to attend college and earned three degrees from Southern Illinois University. She taught countless students in her 20+ years in the SUIC Department of Political Science, where she emphasized and encouraged participatory democracy. Beyond the classroom, she taught American government and democracy to international scholars through a summer program funded by the U.S. State Department in conjunction with the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute.

Barb also had a deep passion and commitment for creating avenues for women to engage in the political process and public service, and she was a co-founder of the Illinois Women's Institute for Leadership Training Academy (IWILTA), Vice Chair of the Democratic Party of Illinois, an elector in the 2012 Electoral College, a co-founder of Southwestern Illinois Democratic Women, and a founder of Southern Illinois Democratic Women. Additionally, she served as the Randolph County Clerk of the Courts, the former Chair of the Randolph County Democratic Central Committee, a nine-time delegate to the Democratic National Convention, a two-time candidate for Illinois' 58th State Senate District, and served notable roles in the campaigns of President Bill Clinton and President Barack Obama.

Sadly, Barb will receive the Party Builder Award posthumously, as she passed away on May 5, 2016. Her son, Randolph County Chair Nate Brown, is accepting the Party Builder Award on her behalf. In a letter read by the family at her funeral, President Barack Obama remembered Barb as living “a life of commitment: commitment to her family; her community; her students. She taught political science at Southern Illinois

University but to Barb, politics was more than theory. It was a way to improve lives and strengthen communities, and she practiced that faith through her service to the people of Randolph County and her tireless efforts on behalf of the Democratic Party. As a statewide candidate, I quickly learned what Dick Durbin and other Democrats knew: If you want anything done in Southern Illinois, call Barb Brown.”

A major figure in the labor movement in Illinois, **John Penn** has served the Laborers’ International Union of North America (LIUNA) for over fifty years. He first joined Local Union 362 in Bloomington, Illinois as a second-generation member in 1965, and ascended to his current position as the union’s Vice President and Midwest Regional Manager in 2008. Along the way, he served as secretary-treasurer and business manager for Local 362, as well as business manager of the Great Plains Laborers’ District Council.

At Local 362, John was renowned for his ability to empower union members at the grassroots level. “We were raised that the member is always first,” he has said -- and his career serves as proof of that philosophy. Under John’s leadership, Local 362 made significant strides toward improving the lives of its members. John’s other recognitions include the Presidential Points of Light Award from President Clinton (given to individuals whose voluntary, direct action solves social issues in their communities) and the Bloomington Pantagraph’s Person of the Year recognition, both in 2003.

John’s tireless commitment to bettering his community does not end with LIUNA. He also serves as a Co-Chair of the Children’s Christmas Party for Unemployed Families and on the Board of Directors for the Illinois Special Olympics. In addition, he is a past member of the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board, a past Vice President of the McLean County Economic Development Council, and a past member of the Illinois Department of Transportation Highway Safety Committee. John also helped to re-establish the Bloomington Labor Day Parade (after a 40-year absence) and began the McLean County Union News, which ran from 1982 to 2002. John has been a strong advocate for Organized Labor within the Democratic Party and served as the Chair of the McLean County Democratic Party until 2018.

John and his wife, Mary, still reside in Bloomington. They have one daughter, three grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Brown and Penn will be recognized at the County Chairs’ Brunch at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Springfield, Illinois on August 18th at 9:00 A.M. They are the third and fourth honorees of the Party Builder Award in 2021, joining Senate President **Don Harmon** and Speaker **Emanuel “Chris” Welch**. For more information or tickets to the IDCCA County Chairs’ Brunch, go to www.ildccabrunch.org.