

## Tony Jones – 2023 IPCF Philanthropist of the Year (Bloomington-Normal)

Tony Jones of Bloomington has made a positive difference in the lives of people in our community. Tony has used his philanthropic skills to benefit the entire Bloomington-Normal community for more than 30 years. He is the epitome of a servant leader as demonstrated by the variety of community efforts, programs and organizations that he has either led, provided services for, influenced, shared his vision and provided positive role modeling for to uplift our community in any way that he can. He has used his efforts to educate, enhance and facilitate the spirit of “diversity and inclusion” long before they became the buzzwords they are today.



Tony has been an outstanding example of what civic responsibility looks like by his voluntary and long-term commitments as the key organizer for several community events such as the City of Bloomington and Town of Normal’s annual Martin Luther King Jr. Awards Banquet and the annual Juneteenth Celebration. Thousands of people have attended these events each year. The award banquet provides our community with the opportunity to spotlight individuals who deserve recognition and the Juneteenth celebration honors a historical event with entertainment, food and booths that give attendees access to a variety of representatives from our community.

Arguably, Tony’s greatest contribution is his more than 20 years leading the annual Bloomington-Normal Cultural Fest typically held at Miller Park. At its peak, this event attracted more than 12,000 people and provided a venue for the entire community to showcase a variety of cultures, entertainment and community resources, such as social service agencies, local schools and the Health Department. Tony’s willingness to serve in this long-term leadership role is evidence of not only providing vision for this treasured community event, but the ability to involve others in philanthropic activity.

Cultural Fest is very important in a community without large percentages of racial/ethnic minorities (the 2020 census indicated Bloomington has a 78% White population, 8% Black, 5% Asian and 5% Hispanic). The Cultural Fest gives all of the community an opportunity to experience snapshots of cultures that they might otherwise never encounter. It provides a safe space for families and individuals to develop an appreciation for the diversity within our community.

It could not take place without a large number of volunteers who view Tony as the “go to” leader of this event. A real leader not only knows how to lead, but inspires others to tap into their passions and desires to get involved while working towards a common goal. Another sign of Tony’s leadership is how he is not always “out front.” He puts others first and allows the spotlight to shine on them. His quiet demeanor should never be underestimated; he is the powerful force behind every initiative he is involved with.

Tony had another vision and a desire to fill needs in our community and created “the Mix Online” website, which publishes upcoming community events for Bloomington-Normal, Peoria, Decatur and Springfield. This website helps the community connect and become informed and reaches out to the African-American community in all of Central Illinois. From 2008 to 2010, he also published a companion magazine known as “The Mix Magazine.”

In 2009-2011, he spearheaded the creation of the “Entrepreneur Showcase” to highlight and inform the community about minority-owned businesses and to foster entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. This event not only served as a vehicle to showcase small business and promote entrepreneurship, it had a strategic emphasis on promoting business ownership and education about resources among the community’s under-represented population.

Tony is a talented entrepreneur and philanthropist who donates his time and services to a variety of community organizations helping them implement successful events and initiatives. In 2007, he created a monthly fundraising event for community organizations known as the “Thursday Mix.” Each month, a different organization received all of the proceeds. When the event concluded in 2010, more than \$30,000 had been donated to local charities and community organizations.

In addition to his general community work, Tony has a heart for uplifting youth. He is the co-founder of the Mentoring and Providing Scholarships Program (MAPS), which provides high school seniors with information they need for success in college, plus scholarships to help students pursue a college education. Tony coordinates with multiple organizations such as the NAACP, sororities and fraternities to provide fundraising and programming throughout the year. MAPS culminates with a scholarship award presentation at the end of the school year. The mentoring and scholarships often involve first-generation college students; Tony knows this will impact the trajectory for many families, affecting the generational wealth afforded by a college education.

Tony recently came out of retirement after a 36-year career in the computer science industry to work as a manager at Heartland Community College's Workforce Equity Initiative.

Tony is truly an individual who is making a difference and has demonstrated an impact throughout Bloomington-Normal and beyond. He has an enormous sense of civic commitment and responsibility and is deserving of the title of Philanthropist of the Year.

The list below gives a sense of the depth, breadth and longevity of Tony's service, philanthropy and involvement in our community.

- Bloomington & Peoria Minority Business Development Center: Board member, 2022-present
- Human Services Council: Council member, 2022-present
- Bloomington Human Relations Commission: Past chair, 1998-2014, reappointed 2017-present
- Bloomington-Normal Black History Project: 2018-present
- 100 Black Men of Central Illinois: Board member, 2008-present
- Juneteenth Planning Committee: Committee member, 2004-present
- Cultural Festival Inc.: Program director, 2001-present
- Mentoring And Providing Scholarships (MAPS): Co-founder, 2002-present
- Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Bloomington Alumni: Member, 1989-present
- Bloomington and Normal Service & Greek Organizations: Committee member, 1989-present
- NAACP (Bloomington-Normal): Member and past executive board member, 1985-present
- McLean County Urban League: Past chair, 1999-2013
- Boys & Girls Club of Bloomington: Board member, 1995-2012
- Bloomington Cultural District: Board member, 2009-2011
- West Bloomington Revitalization Project (WBRP): Board member, 2008-2010
- Orlando Community Center: Board member, 2000-2007
- Black Business Alliance (BBA): Charter member and past president, 1987-2006
- Leadership for McLean County: Class of 2003
- Minority And Police Partnership (MAPP): Charter member, 2001-2003

## **Awards**

- North Central Kappa Alpha Psi Community Service Award, 2023
- North Central Region of Kappa Alpha Psi Community Service Award, 2023
- Peoria Minority Business Development Center Community Advocate Award, 2017
- City of Bloomington Dr. Martin L. King Jr. Community Award, 2015
- Bloomington-Normal Alumni Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Inc.'s Community Service Award, 2014
- Bloomington Westside Block Party's Award of Appreciation, 2014
- Community Service Award presented by Ad Hoc group of community members, 2011
- NAACP's Roy Wilken Jr. Community Leadership Award, 2010
- McLean County Urban League's Volunteer of the Year Award, 2009
- Central Region of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. presented Community Economic Empowerment Award, 2008
- North Central Region of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc.'s Man of the Year Award, 2007
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Bloomington-Normal Chapter's Community Leadership Award, 2006
- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Bloomington-Normal Chapter's Community Service Award, 2006
- NAACP's Community Service Award, 2005
- Kappa Alpha Psi Bloomington-Normal Alumni Chapter's Man of the Year Award, 1992-2002