

Editorial

Honoring Jeff Erlanger

Jeff Erlanger was a remarkable participant in the civic life of Madison. His achievements were tangible, and extensive.

Before his untimely death in June, Erlanger was an essential player in the shaping of local policy on people with disabilities and a host of other matters. He chaired the board of the Community Living Alliance. He served on the Madison Economic Development Commission. He was a member and former chair of the Madison Commission on People With Disabilities.

Erlanger's specific accomplishments ranged from securing accessible taxi cab service for all to organizing Madison's first conference on accessible housing.

But what made Erlanger truly remarkable was the fact that he involved himself in so many of what are usually referred to as "fights" and yet never seemed to make any enemies.

As Mayor Dave Cieslewicz explains it: "Jeff understood that reasonable people could have very different views on how to solve complex problems, and that sometimes you need to raise issues to achieve important goals. But he did it with compassion, integrity, respect and civility.

Madison would be a better place if we followed in his footsteps."

Cieslewicz is doing his part to encourage others to follow in Erlanger's footsteps. He has announced the creation of the Jeffrey Clay Erlanger Civility in Public Discourse Award to commemorate what the mayor refers to as "the late activist's passionate yet civil style in advocating on behalf of people with disabilities."

It is a fitting and hopefully inspirational tribute that will be presented each November, around the time of Erlanger's birthday, to the individual Madisonian or local organization that has best demonstrated a commitment to civility and respect during debate on controversial issues.

Cieslewicz plans to establish an awards committee that will accept nominations and select the recipient each year.

"Madison has lost one of its most eloquent, thoughtful and respectful activists. Jeff proved that passionate and considerate are not mutually exclusive terms," says the mayor. "It is a fitting tribute to Jeff to annually honor the individual or organization that best emulates his diplomatic style in heated debate."

We commend the mayor for coming up with the ideal response to the loss of Jeff Erlanger's wise and good voice. And we hope that the community will embrace the opportunity to celebrate humane and effective activism.