

Susanne C. Adams Award

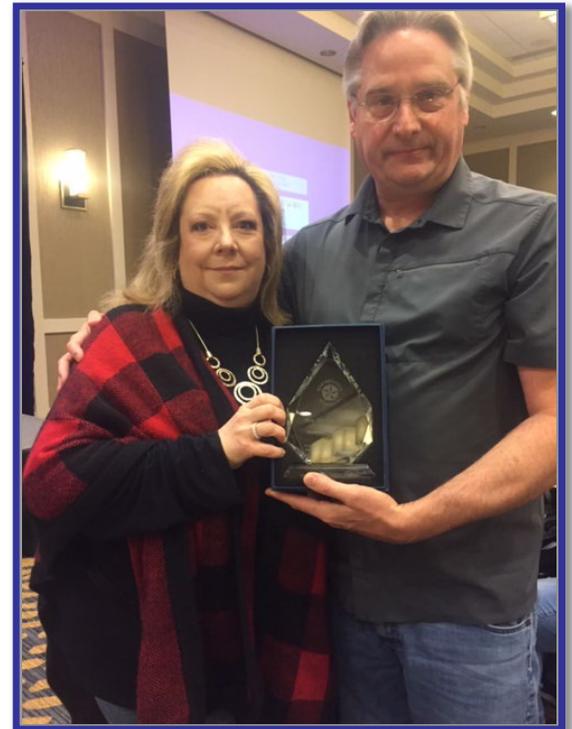
Ben DeVries

This is the 25th anniversary of the Susanne C. Adams Award, which was created in 1997 to honor Susanne Adams, the first recipient of the award, and also to honor those who, like Susanne, set an example for the rest of us in the mediation community to follow. The award recognizes exceptional and outstanding efforts in promoting and furthering the use of mediation in Texas. The Adams Award is TAM's most prestigious honor.

Susanne Adams was active in the Texas mediation community as early as 1982. She was a pioneer in the Texas mediation movement; a founding member of TAM, the Greater Houston Mediation Network, and the Dallas Mediation Council; a member of one of the first boards of the directors for TAM; and TAM President from 1988 to 1990.

Over the past 25 years, TAM has recognized 29 additional pioneers in the Texas mediation movement. All those we have recognized with this award have made their marks establishing mediation as the preferred way to resolve disputes in Texas. This year is no exception. The TAM Awards Committee chose Ben DeVries to receive the Susanne C. Adams Award this year. Regrettably, it was a posthumous presentation, as Ben passed away on October 24, 2021.

In her nomination of Ben for the award, Elaine Roberts, Executive Director of the Montgomery County DRC, wrote, "Ben DeVries began volunteering with the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County (DRC-MC) in 1999, and he continued to mediate at the DRC-MC on a regular basis up until four days prior to his passing. During the 22 years he served as a DRC-MC volunteer, Ben was consistently a leader, instructor, mentor, and consummate neutral who helped thousands of Montgomery County residents mediate their general, family, CPS, and victim/offender disputes over the years. In addition to always being 'on call' in case of last-minute mediator cancellations and to deal with 'difficult clients,' Ben was always available to help teach mediation skills. Over the years, he was an instructor for more DRC-MC 20+ basic mediation training programs, 20+ family mediation programs, and numerous CPS training programs. Ben also shared his love of mediation with fellow DRC-MC mediators by conducting numerous continuing education training programs that he designed and presented such as Mediating 101, Crafting Enforceable MSAs, and Mediating Insurance Cases. And Ben wasn't above donning a furry cap, mustache, and black nose so that he could be Papa Bear to elementary school students to teach them mediation skills through use of the Goldilocks and the Three Bears mediation scenario.



Mark and Kris DeVries accepted the posthumous award on Ben's behalf at the 2022 TAM Conference.

“At several times during his tenure at the DRC-MC, Ben DeVries and Charlsie Moore served as Interim Executive Directors for the DRC-MC. Judges, board members, attorneys, clients, and volunteer mediators respected and trusted both of them so much that the DRC-MC was able to stay open and prosper despite difficult times. When I became Executive Director at the DRC-MC nearly eight years ago, Ben stepped up to mentor me and provide selfless assistance. It is no exaggeration to say the Ben’s assistance and friendship were invaluable to me and the success of the DRC-MC.

“Multiple times over the years, other Texas Dispute Resolution Centers asked Ben to assist them with training, and he willingly volunteered his time and talent to assist them, as well. When two counties needed assistance establishing their own dispute resolution centers, Ben was there, too. He never tired of sharing his time, talent, and expertise with anyone/everyone.

“Significantly, when the pandemic struck, the DRC-MC had to shift from in-person mediations to mediations via Zoom. Surprisingly, Ben jumped into Zoom mediations whole-heartedly, even though many mediators half his age shied away from the ‘new method’ of mediating. Although he preferred to do in-person mediations, Ben recognized immediately that people needed mediation assistance more during the pandemic, and he was willing to learn Zoom mediation skills in order to provide that assistance.

“This nomination form is not long enough for me to fully detail all that Ben DeVries contributed to the DRC-MC and other dispute resolution centers across the state during these last 22 years. Ben was more than a volunteer mediator—he was a friend, a mentor, an exemplary role model, a servant/leader, and a strong advocate for peaceful resolution of disputes. Humble and inquisitive until the end, Ben was constantly striving to improve his mediation skills. He always participated in the DRC-MC Mediator Roundtable sessions, where he not only shared his wisdom but he also sought out advice on how he could do things better from other mediators. Ben's last training session for volunteer mediators was done via Zoom less than a month before he died, and his last client mediation evaluation form came in for a mediation he completed four days prior to his death. Extremely positive, the client evaluation form showed how much Ben was still contributing to members of the community until the very end.”