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PRIA Announces Two Ernst Scholarships Awards

The Property Records Industry Association (PRIA) has presented two Ernst Scholarships Awards for the 2015-16 membership year which begins on August 1, 2015. The Ernst Scholarship Award was established by Ernst Publishing Co., in conjunction with PRIA, in recognition of the late Carl R. Ernst for his contributions to PRIA and the extended property records industry.

This year marks just the second time the awards have been bestowed.

The first recipient of a government sector scholarship is Gayle VanHooser, register of deeds for Grundy Co., Tenn. VanHooser was elected register of deeds in 1994 and has been in office for 21 consecutive years. When she first came into office, paper and pen were the means by which documents were recorded, but in her first year in office, VanHooser began the process of computerizing all the county's records.

She became an active member of the Middle Tennessee Register of Deeds Association, the Tennessee Register of Deeds Association and the County Officials Association of Tennessee. She completed the University of Tennessee's Certified Public Administrator program within her first three years at the Register of Deed's office. The County Officials Association of Tennessee named VanHooser Register of Year in both 1997 and 1998, and in 2007 named her County Official of the Year.

VanHooser takes a collaborative approach to problem-solving and engages leaders from other county offices, as well as fellow registers to advance and improve the functioning of Registers of Deeds offices across the state.

A second government sector scholarship was awarded to Melissa Dunlap, chief of staff to the South Carolina Secretary of State. Dunlap was the primary driving force in helping South Carolina provide a statutory framework to implement eRecording. She helped her office earn national awards for an online UCC filing system, a searchable notary database and greatly enhanced the corporate online search and retrieval system.

Dunlap led the Governor's Committee on eRecording from the initial compilation of a committee to drafts of standards and regulations to attendance at legislative hearings. With her support, the Secretary of State's records in South Carolina are more accessible and reliable than ever.

The Ernst Scholarship Awards include a one year PRIA Membership for recipients, along with conference registration and travel to one PRIA conference during the membership year. The awards are valued at \$2,000, plus a complimentary membership in PRIA.

According to PRIA President Mark Ladd, "The late Carl Ernst was one of the original members of the Property Records Industry Joint Task Force, the predecessor to PRIA, and a tireless advocate for the development of both eRecording and basic standards for the property records industry. We could not be more pleased to partner with Ernst Publishing Co. in sponsoring this scholarship."

The award criteria, established in 2013, require that eligible applicants have not previously been members of PRIA and have demonstrated exceptional accomplishments in their chosen fields, been active in their communities and proven service consistent with the mission and continued excellence of PRIA.

"I'm sure Carl would be pleased to see that PRIA continues to be the preeminent advocate for the collaboration of business and government throughout the public records industry," states Gregory E. Teal, president & CEO of Ernst Publishing Co. "Increased membership and participation will only stand to further strengthen the association. We are proud to sponsor these scholarships. Congratulations to the recipients and, as Carl would say, 'keep plugging.' "

This year's recipients were selected from a pool of applicants by a committee that includes the PRIA officers and a representative of Ernst Publishing Co. The two scholarships will be awarded annually assuming valid application submissions by qualified candidates.

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The Property Records Industry Association (PRIA) develops and promotes national standards and best practices for the land records industry. PRIA is a coalition of government and business partners collaborating to formulate positions on issues of common interest. PRIA strives to identify areas of consensus within the industry, leading to recommendations for national standards pertaining to recordable documents. For more information, visit www.pria.us.