

June 26, 2015

"Sages Over 70" Selection Committee:

With enthusiasm I add my voice to the nomination of Vernon Johnson for 2015 the Business Publications' "Sages Over 70" recognition. I first came into the sphere of Vernon's influence some 20 years ago when I was with United Way full time. I have been an admirer and beneficiary of Vernon's brilliance and leadership ever since.

Vernon's passion for young people is unrivaled. He believes in their potential and works tirelessly to make sure others recognize and support better futures for kids.

For me Vernon's work to bring community awareness and leadership to the mission of improving outcomes for young people stands out as most worthy. Several years ago Vernon created a leadership effort to this end and I was fortunate to be part of it. He gathered a half dozen leaders in the field of social capital and challenged us to "step up our game" on behalf of kids. His motivational skills are supreme. He applauded our extensive investment in kids, but said that even with all those resources we weren't getting the job done. He suggested we get to work on creating "better money" and we did! He acknowledged we cared and worked positively on behalf of kids, but still conditions were bleak for many. He suggested we become more focused and "Name Each Child" and we did with more vigor. Vernon indicated we were good leaders, but together we could exert more muscle and have an ever bigger impact and named us the "Six Pack". Vernon's leadership made a big difference in the effectiveness of our work-he's hard to ignore!

I found Vernon to be sage 20 years ago and he has only gotten "sagier" over time. I highly recommend Vernon for recognition as a "Sage Over 70" honoree!

Sincerely,

Martha Willits