President's Award for Services to Chess – John Wheeler

In 1998 the Hampshire Chess Association had one of those catastrophic events where all the officers suddenly resigned. Hampshire had to turn to a Devon County player, living in Hampshire to come forward as a temporary HCA Secretary. This person was John Wheeler and in 2023 he finally stepped down from this "temporary" role.

In 25 years as HCA Secretary John worked with 10 Hampshire President's, but safe to say everything that went through Hampshire Chess was steered by John, making excellent, pragmatic decisions, to ensure the smooth running of the organisation.

Among his successes was ensuring the HCA Congress, including the Hampshire Individual Championship was held each year until the pandemic, and helping build this from a 25-player tournament, to a full three-section sold out congress in the centre of Fareham. As well as supporting the Congress in person by assisting the arbiter, John has also supported the Congress in other ways, to ensure it was held every year.

As with the best organisers, members are unaware of the work which is completed behind the scenes. When players arrive at County Matches, or the Congress they are playing in, they will not think about the work to book the venue and arbiter, and other activities to allow the smooth running of the event. John was the person who completed this for 25 years, bringing the HCA committee together, but also welcoming suggestions and improvements to be made in this time.

Although John was at the helm of the HCA for 25 years, his involvement in the Portsmouth and District Chess League is even longer. He was elected Hon. Secretary of the PDCL in September 1981, stepping down in September 2021, a remarkable 40-year stint! To put this into context John was the PDCL secretary for more than 50% of its history.

John also brought his excellent administration abilities to the West of England Chess Union (WECU), where he held the various officer roles including Secretary, President and Vice President over 25+ years.

Despite all these administration duties, John has continued to play chess at a very high level, representing England at Senior events and playing in the British Chess Championship. John also beat a young Michael Adams on board one for Devon against Cornwall in the WECU. John is also currently in the top 15 players in the +85 age category in England.

John is a very private person, but I cannot think of many other candidates who are more deserving of the ECF's President's Award for Services to Chess. Although this nomination has been raised by the Hampshire Chess Association current committee, this has been supported by the PDCL Secretary and WECU committee, to honour John for the work he has completed running and supporting chess in Hampshire, and the West of England.

HAMPSHIRE
CHESS ASSOCIATION

President: Peter Eales
Secretary: Graham Stuart
Affiliated: English Chess Federation
and West of England Chess Union

Graham Stuart
(Secretary, Hampshire Chess Association)