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CONA honors area's best neighborhoods, neighbors
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Richard Davis rose to his feet amid an eruption of cheers and hand claps as his name was called.

The sounds of praise came from the rear of the spacious banquet room at the University Center Monday evening. They belonged to residents living in the Macon community where Davis has made an impact. Soon those cheers triggered a standing ovation by the nearly 200 attendees, peppered with police officers, deputies, elected officials and other neighborhood residents.

Davis' award as the city's Neighbor of the Year was one of several given out at the 26th Annual Awards Banquet, hosted by the Council of Neighborhood Associations. This was the first year the city, county and CONA combined to put on the event.

"Shocked" - that was the first word that came to mind when Sheri Peacock heard Camellia Gardens had won the city's small-neighborhood category.

After all, the Camellia Gardens Neighborhood Association was created in January 2005. President Michael Turner, 27, and Peacock, 26, were surprised but humbled by the recognition.

"It's a young professionals' neighborhood. But at the same time, you have so many people who really want to bring the neighborhood together," Turner said.

Each city and county winner will receive a sign for their neighborhood and a block party. In addition, two members from the neighborhood's association will go to the state-wide neighborhood conference scheduled for October in Fort Lauderdale.

The audience stood to its feet again when Brenda Tanner was named CONA's Public Servant of the Year. With tears in her eyes and a lump in her throat, Tanner shared how thankful she was to all the city employees and officials who help her stay linked with neighborhood concerns.

"I can't begin to tell you how honored I am that you awarded me this," said Tanner, the city's assistant director of Neighborhood & Community Services. She's retiring this year.

City Commissioner Andrew Gillum and County Commission Chairman Bill Proctor passed out the awards and stressed the importance of active neighborhoods.

"You are certainly the lifeline in our communities," Gillum said. "We appreciate it on the city level, even if you're not able to see us on a daily basis."

This year's winners and nominees:

Neighborhood of the Year Award (200 or more homes): **Woodland Drives.**

Neighborhood of the Year Award (Fewer than 200 homes): **Camellia Gardens.**

Neighbor of the Year: **Richard Davis.**

Neighbor nominees

Michael Dalton, Richard Davis, Jesse Taintor, Edwin Thorpe and Rudy Watson.

City neighborhood nominees

Bloxham Terrace, Camellia Gardens, Greater Brandt Hills, Woodland Drives and Eastgate.

Leon County's winners

Neighborhood of the Year Award (200 or more homes): **Jake Gaither.**

Neighborhood of the Year Award (Fewer than 200 homes): **Avondale.**

Unincorporated Area Neighborhood of the Year Award: **The Vineyards.**

County nominees

Jake Gaither, the Vineyards, Avondale and Eastgate.

CONA Public Servant of the Year: Brenda Tanner, assistant director of Neighborhood & Community Services for the city of Tallahassee.
