

SAGAMORE OF THE WABASH AWARD

The Sagamore of the Wabash award was created during the term of Governor Ralph Gates, who served from 1945 to 1949. Governor Gates was to attend a tri-state meeting in Louisville with officials from the states of Ohio and Kentucky. Aides to the governor discovered that the governor of Kentucky was preparing a Kentucky Colonel certificates for Governor Gates and Senator Robert A. Taft, who to represent the State of Ohio. The Hoosiers decided that Indiana should have an appropriate award to present in return.

The term “sagamore” was used by the American Indian Tribes of the northeastern United States to describe a lesser chief or a great man among the tribe to whom the true chief would look for wisdom and advice.

Each governor since Gates has presented the certificates in their own way. It has been said that one governor even resorted to wearing full Indian headdress as he read the scrolls. The award is highest honor, which the Governor of Indiana bestows. It is a personal tribute usually given to those who have rendered a distinguished service to the state or to the governor. Among these who have received Sagamores have been astronauts, presidents, ambassadors, artists, musicians, politicians, and ordinary citizens who have contributed greatly to our Hoosier heritage.

It should be noted that the Sagamores have been conferred upon both men and women. There is no record of the total number which have been presented, as each governor has kept his own roll; just as each has reserved the right to personally select the recipients.