Ethics Reaps Rewards  
*By Shannon Warren for The Journal Record, May 11, 2015*

Since 2006, retired Oklahoma Quality Foundation Director Mike Strong has convened the OK Ethics Selection Award Team to identify organizations making outstanding efforts to foster integrity in their workplaces. It is a tough process, involving the careful scrutiny of three-ring binders full of data measuring the effectiveness of each candidates’ efforts. If selected, their applications are placed online so that best practices can be replicated by others. This year, the team picked Kimray, Inc. as their top honoree for the annual OK Ethics Compass Award.

A hallmark of Kimray’s enduring success has been its emphasis on building a culture based on good character. In 1992, CEO Tom Hill developed the Character First® program and introduced it among Kimray’s employees. The Oklahoma City manufacturer of control equipment and valves for the upstream oil and gas industry realized the program’s impact through fewer worker’s comp claims, increased productivity and profitability.

The Character First® initiative systemically permeates the entire organization, beginning with the hiring process. Frequent recognition for good character positively reinforces important habits, as does ongoing, open dialogue with employees about the practical application of key principles. The main focus is on 49 down-to-earth character traits. These are simple, well-defined virtues. One example is the description of dependability as “Fulfilling what I consented to do, even if it means unexpected sacrifice.”

Seeing the success of this initiative, others seized the opportunity to promote good character in their organizations, too. Character First® is now being implemented by a private company, Strata Leadership. Their records indicate that the program has been adopted by over 2000 businesses, 1800 school districts and many communities, both here and abroad. In fact, several OK Ethics Community Impact Award honorees also use it, including the Oklahoma County Sheriff’s Office.

Sheriff John Whetsel implemented the program to address problems of discipline and vandalism in the juvenile housing unit. The initiative worked so well that the 45,000 detainees passing through the Oklahoma County Detention Center are now exposed to the program in some form or another. In addition, the employees of the Sheriff’s Office receive training, too.

Kimray didn’t need accolades to do the right thing, but the attention is well-deserved. This humble company has become a guiding light for others seeking a better way to reap rewards by investing in the personal development of their workforce.