

FROM THE PAGES OF *LEADERS & LUMINARIES* E-MAGAZINE ...

## *Vintage Voice*

### **Quality is our recipe, too**

By Rick Dana Barlow

SCHAUMBURG, IL (April 7, 2026) – Entrepreneur Rex David Thomas is a sales and marketing icon. If no blog, broadcast media outlet, periodical or textbook trumpets that subjective fact (based on considerable career evidence, by the way), then each shows him great disrespect and does the business world a grave disservice.

You likely know Dave Thomas, who died in 2002, as the founder of the Wendy’s fast-food chain. Yet he represents so much more than that. In fact, the initial and early success of Col. Harland Sanders and the Kentucky Fried Chicken fast-food brand can be directly attributed to Thomas and his mission and vision. But that’s a tale for another time as well as the motivation for him launching Wendy’s. Feel free to look up his background on the internet if you want to piece together and know the full story of the corporate drama.

Thomas debuted at least a half-dozen unique innovations at Wendy’s, many of which ultimately were adopted by competitors and became standard operating procedures for the fast-food industry. One of them is a component of the headline, which borrows and adapts Wendy’s motto since 1970, emphasizing its food production and customer service philosophies.



The innovation? Improving the design, function and set-up of the drive-through window.

Thomas didn't invent the fast-food drive-through or "drive-thru" window. History lists several other fast-food establishments debuting components of the drive-thru window service as far back as the late 1940s through the early 1950s, including In-N-Out Burger, Red's Giant Hamburg and Maid-Rite Sandwich Shop (both of which were popular along the Route 66 corridor in Missouri and Illinois, respectively) and Jack-in-the-Box. Those early incarnations just enabled people to drive up to the side of the building, order a meal and then sit and wait for the order to be completed.

Thomas found that to be rather inefficient. So, what did he do? He created the modern drive-thru operation we enjoy today where you drive around to the back of the building, order at a kiosk and then drive up to the window to pick up your order.

Why does that matter? It provides a bit of emotional and mental relief on part of the consumer as well as the producer. The consumer gets to read the menu on his or her own time and "order ahead," so to speak, so the consumer doesn't have to order at the window and wait. It also provides a similar relief to the producer (in this case, Wendy's), in that the staffers get a little more time to produce the order without frantically worrying that the consumer at the window is waiting "too long."

Granted, this design may have only reduced the entire process by a few minutes or so, but emotionally and mentally, it seemed more efficient and convenient.

How does this philosophy apply to Bellwether League Foundation? Look no further than its annual nomination process for Bellwether Honorees, Ammer Honorees and Future Famers.

In the early days, the Board of Directors (from all around the country) sat around a long table, poring over a stack of submissions in a hotel conference room for an entire business day. During that more than eight-hour period, Board members would read through and then discuss the merits of each nominated candidate – individually and then against each other based on a categorical framework of elements. Sometimes those discussions got a bit heated. After all, these were dedicated and passionate professionals devoted to BLF's mission and vision and

wanted to do the right thing, the optimal thing, for both candidate and organization. At the end of the day, the Executive Director would conduct a secret ballot vote and the results would be certified by the Board Secretary and ultimately revealed to the industry.



Bellwether League Board members assessing nominations in 2013 in a hotel conference room. Seated from left to right: Jim Francis, Pat Carroll, Mike Louviere, Mark Van Sumeren, Jamie Kowalski, John Gaida, Jean Sargent, Vance Moore, John Strong and Mary Starr.

This seemed a bit like ordering at the drive-thru window and then waiting for an entire day to be served. Valiant Board members were exhausted – mentally and physically – but, by and large, pleased with the outcome.

Fast-forward to today to see an assessment process much more like Thomas’ “split-window” drive-thru process. In fact, at the time of this Vintage Voice column’s publication, BLF’s candidate

assessment process actually surpassed the midway point for the 2026 classes.

BLF’s modern nomination process incorporates a bit more science and efficiency. If you’re interested in a taste of how it works you can watch two videos on the BLF website on the Nominations page

(<https://www.bellwetherleague.org/nominations.php#gsc.tab=0>).

The Executive Director still collects the elements of each candidate’s nomination package, which includes the completed nomination form, bio, CV/résumé and any recommendation letters. The nomination packages, organized by award class, then go to BLF’s Nominating Committee, which consists of elected Board and appointed Advisory Council members, as well as inducted Bellwethers and recognized Ammer Honorees and Future Famers who wish to be part of the process. This august group of active and retired professionals assess all the submitted content, scoring the material representing each candidate on a spreadsheet. Consider this the “kiosk” point of the “drive-thru window process.”

Then the Nominating Committee submits a recommended slate of candidates for each award class to the Board of Directors for additional review, discussion and vote. Note that all Nominating Committee members as well as Board members read all submitted nominations. From there, the Board votes on who to include in each of the award classes for that year. Consider this the “window” point of the “drive-thru window process.”

Over the years, BLF has incorporated more science into a process that relied on a rather fair-and-balanced artistic approach to bring more “objectivity” into something that readily could hinge on “subjectivity.” This is what makes the assessment process more efficient and valuable to the volunteers conducting it. And it should make the awards more valuable to those receiving them for either induction or recognition because those decisions emanate from a group of experienced professionals eager to and intent on reflecting and rewarding excellent performance.

As Fred Crans, Bellwether Class of 2020, and the BLF Board’s Outreach Ambassador, is known to say, recognition is a “Big Deal.” He refers to the attitude of the award recipients to respect and revere the recognition not only on the achievements and accomplishments used to qualify the candidate(s), but also on the professionals independently and thoroughly assessing them. It’s not a personality or popularity contest, but one based on personal contributions to a professional cause.

It’s a sobering process that we not only take seriously but provide with all the honor and respect deserved. It’s who we are and why we exist. We hope you feel and see it the same way.

Keep nominating.

*Rick Dana Barlow serves as Co-Founder and Executive Director, Bellwether League Foundation, and Executive Editor of BLF’s Leaders & Luminaries e-magazine. Barlow’s column, Vintage Voice, is posted/published in Leaders & Luminaries and here. Barlow has nearly four decades of journalistic editorial experience, more than 30 years of which have been dedicated to covering a cornucopia of healthcare operational topics, including supply chain, sterile processing, surgical services, infection prevention, information technology, diagnostic imaging and radiology and laboratory for a variety of print and online media outlets. For more, visit Bellwether League Foundation’s web site at*

<https://www.bellwetherleague.org/> and Barlow's online profile at <https://rickdanabarlow.wixsite.com/wingfootmedia>.