

2023 DIOLKOS RECIPIENT

Practical Visionary Servant Leadership



RODNEY M. WEINZIERL

Executive Director

Illinois Corn Growers Association



The 2023 Diolkos Recipient, Rodney Weinzierl, exemplifies a life of service. Nationally recognized as an agricultural leader who is innovative with seemingly endless patience, he delivers practical solutions time and time again. While farming full-time, Weinzierl has continually served as Executive Director of the Illinois Corn Growers Association (ILCGA) and the Illinois Corn Marketing Board (ILCMB) since 1993. Although both these organizations have different purposes, they have the same goal to serve, help, and provide information for nearly 5,000 Illinois corn farmers. Both organizations advise local, state, and federally elected officials of agricultural issues from the farmers' perspective. Weinzierl is heavily involved with Farm Bill negotiations to ensure more equitable programs for farmers and save taxpayer's money.

Viewed as a practical visionary, his laser focus is on practical answers that deliver solutions for the greater good. During the Covid years, he collaborated with the ethanol industry to produce and distribute hand-sanitizer to first responders. Another example is his award-winning Precision Conservation Management (PCM) which developed from partnering with NASA to understand better U.S. farm conservation. PCM is now being adopted by other states. That's his way of delivering a solution.

Weinzierl is an active board member of and strong advocate for the Waterways Council (WCI). As an advocacy organization, WCI delivers impressive results year after year for the maintenance and repair of our locks and dams as well as updating the infrastructure of our inland river system which is used to deliver agricultural products for domestic and international markets.

For years, Weinzierl has advocated with WCI and their broad spectrum of membership to have funds allocated for Lock 25 on the Mississippi River. On November 5, 2022, the infrastructure package of the Army Corps of Engineers budget was passed allocating \$32 million for Lock 25. The official ceremony for this project was celebrated on May 18, 2023. Weinzierl's servant leadership is apparent in his various community involvements such as helping his wife run the local food pantry and serving on the board of his church.

The Diolkos Legacy

600 B.C. to 50 A.D.

Annually, the Diolkos Award recognizes a leader in the freight transportation/logistics sector who combines business success with life-long contributions for the well-being of others. Diolkos recipients have integrity, innovative thinking, and inspires others professionally and personally. Although the Diolkos Wagonway (DW) was critically important for the Ancient World, we do not know the names of those who developed it. The originators focused on results, not having their names go down in prosperity. This trait is shared by our Diolkos recipients.

DW was a successful land route from 600 B.C. to 50 A.D. near Corinth on the Isthmus of Corinth. DW birthed a vibrant, ancient economy and changed the fate of wars. By offering safer transport of heavy cargo, i.e., marble, timber, etc., to and from the lucrative markets of Athens, DW avoided the treacherous Peloponnese Seas that plagued the region causing the loss of lives and cargo.

Diolkos, an ancient Greek word, combined the words "across" and "portage machine". DW was given to a paved, five-mile-long trackway with parallel grooves that measured about 63" apart, similar to the modern railroad. The parallel grooves served as tracks for wheeled vehicles that transported heavy cargo across the Isthmus of Corinth. Animals and human labor pulled the heavily laden carts along the trackway from one side of Corinth to the other side. Because DW was open to all upon payment, it served as a public railway.

1st Freight Supply Chain

The innovative thinking and creative solution to transporting heavy freight quickly and safely is the first historical evidence of an effective, efficient Supply Chain linking the delivery of cargo from land to water to land. Why it ended remains a mystery.

The Diolkos Wagonway is also known as the Mother of the first Railroad. Historians claim the efficiency and speed of this trackway was well known throughout the Ancient World from the expression "as fast as a Corinthian". This method of transporting cargo did not reoccur until the 19th century when the modern railroad was launched with the steam engine in the United Kingdom in 1825. It was more than 170 years later before the critical importance of a highly effective Supply Chain was recognized.

