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**MIKE FULJENZ**

2023 Chester L.  
Krause Memorial  
Award Recipient

**A DETECTIVE  
STORY**

*The Missing  
Diplomatic Medal*

**MIKE FULJENZ**, the 2023 Chester L. Krause Memorial Distinguished Service Award recipient, is a spirited educator and hobby spokesman who befriends everyone he meets.



PHOTO: BEE PHOTOGRAPHY

SETTING THE  
GOLD  
STANDARD

*Crime fighter Mike Fuljenz is as much an advocate for the Golden Rule as he is for all things related to precious metals.*

**D**R. MICHAEL RAY FULJENZ EXCELS. Period. He has won more awards than there are cents in a dollar, yards in a football field, members of the U.S. Senate, or tiles in a Scrabble game. Even more remarkable are the reasons behind these recognitions. His unflagging efforts to eradicate numismatic crime, campaign for collectors' rights, provide fiduciary support for educational programs, and spread the joy of the hobby are a testament to his upstanding character. His endeavors have spurred far-reaching outcomes so substantial that the ANA has recognized Fuljenz with its highest honor, the Chester L. Krause Memorial Distinguished Service Award, which will be presented at the Association's World's Fair of Money,

to be held August 8-12 in Pittsburgh.

In the performing arts industry, an artist who has been granted the top four awards has attained the EGOT (Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony). Likewise, Fuljenz's newest accolade makes him the recipient of top awards from four major numismatic organizations—the Professional Numismatists Guild, American Numismatic Association, Numismatic Literary Guild, and National Coin & Bullion Association—or as Fuljenz likes to joke, the "PANN." As a leader in every field of his life, Fuljenz is accustomed to high achievement, but his success is no accident. By the time opportunity comes knocking, Fuljenz will have built a towering castle chock-full of doors to choose from.

ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES/JDAVANKIK



▲ **FULJENZ AND KAREN** (left) met in kindergarten and reunited in college when Fuljenz used this photo as an icebreaker to ask Karen out on a date. They've now been happily married for 44 years. The picture at right shows Fuljenz flanked by his father (a local district attorney) and grandfather—the two individuals most responsible for his love of numismatics.

### Brick by Brick

The foundation for Fuljenz's numismatic career was laid in the early 1960s, when he was just 7 years old. He had received a glowing report card in school, and he proudly showed it to his grandfather, Red Lievens, who began rewarding young Fuljenz with coins for A's decades before the ANA launched its academic-achievement program of the same name. Lievens would stop by the bank and trade in \$1 notes for Morgan dollars from the U.S. Treasury hoard that were being released at the time. "That one silver dollar he got for one paper dollar back then is now worth over \$50 minimum," Fuljenz says. "It

taught me the value of hard assets versus paper money and reminds me of the lyrics to the 1982 song 'Are the Good Times Really Over' by Merle Haggard: 'I wish a buck was still silver. And it was back when the country was strong.' It describes wishing we had real money again, like silver and gold coins."

As Fuljenz grew, so did his interest in the hobby. He purchased his first gold coin at age 12 after mowing 10 lawns—an Indian Head \$5 gold piece priced at \$50. Throughout his teenage years, his uncle drove him to coin-club meetings, and his dad accompanied him to coin shops and shows on the weekends. Indulging in the

## MIKE FULJENZ

### HIGHLIGHTS OF A NUMISMATIC LIFE

1954

Fuljenz was born in Louisiana.



1966

He purchased his first gold coin—an Indian Head \$5—for \$50.

1974

He became president of his first coin club.

1977

He graduated from college.



1979

He married his college sweetheart, Karen.

1981

He joined the ANA.

1984

He helped catch a numismatic criminal for the first time.

1994

He became president of Universal Coin and Bullion in Texas.



**“When I was young, we listened to the radio, had only one TV channel, and there was no Internet. Now there are **so many more** things to do.”**

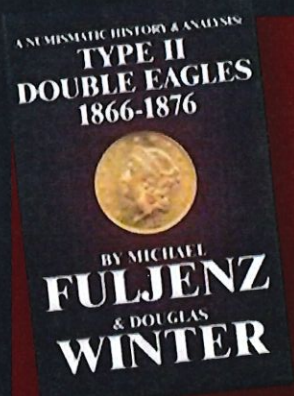
hobby was a great way to pass the time. “When I was young, we listened to the radio, had only one TV channel, and there was no Internet,” Fuljenz says. “Now, there are so many more things to do, but that is also a good thing because information about numismatics has never been easier to obtain.”

As America’s Gold Expert®, Fuljenz has provided plenty of that information himself. He has written four books about double eagles (\$20) and Indian Head gold coins (that first purchase made a lasting impact) in multiple editions and contributed to several other texts. He also hosted an award-winning monthly “Coin Talk” radio show for more than 20 years to “spread the gospel of numismatics,” says Fuljenz. “I think more people should find ways to spread the gospel of numismatics in their communities so we can expand the hobby and other people could appreciate it. If anyone wants to get involved in the coin hobby, the best advice I could give them is to join their local coin club or volunteer to help a local dealer. I would also tell them to join the American Numismatic Association and attend the ANA’s Summer Seminar,

where they will gain a wealth of information and meet other people interested in learning about coins.” From age 27 to 47, Fuljenz taught grading and counterfeit-detection courses at this world-class event and mentored numerous collectors he met there.

A teacher through and through, Fuljenz served as president of the Southwest Louisiana Coin Club and chairman of the Louisiana State Coin Convention while he was in college. After he graduated in 1977, he taught physics and chemistry to high schoolers and college students before moving to Beaumont, Texas. In 1981 he joined the ANA, and he became an authenticator and grader at ANACS the following year. His club memberships started to accumulate, as did his leadership roles—he has served on the boards of the National Coin & Bullion Association (NCBA), Numismatic Literary Guild (NLG), and Gold & Silver Political Action Committee. In 1994 Fuljenz became president of Universal Coin and Bullion, a 29-year tenure that continues today. “It’s wonderful when your hobby can become your work,” he says, “and I enjoy every day looking at coins and writing about coin-related topics.”

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES/DUCTRU (AWARD) & MIKE FULJENZ



1996

He published his first book, *Type II Double Eagles, 1866-1876: A Numismatic History and Analysis*, coauthored with Douglas Winter.

2013

The NLG presented him with a Clemy.



2014

He served as a consultant and sponsor for the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History *Value of Money* exhibit.

2015

His alma mater bestowed upon him an honorary doctorate.

2016

He received PNG’s Sol Kaplan award.

2017

NCBA granted him the Al Kreuzer Memorial Award.

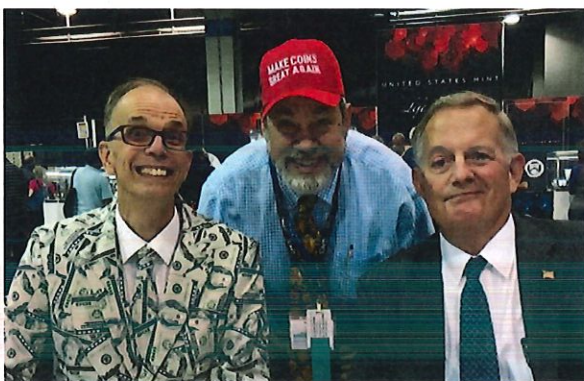
2023

He won the Chester L. Krause Memorial Award.



## His labors have returned millions of dollars to unsuspecting collectors and have expunged countless fakes from the market.

PHOTOS: MIKE FULJENZ



And Fuljenz does a lot of writing about coins. He authors the bimonthly “Market Report” column for *COINage* magazine and is a former *Houston Post*, *Numismatic News*, and *Numismatist* columnist. An outgoing enthusiast who is a stranger to no one, he enjoys promoting the hobby any chance he gets and has appeared on CNBC, Fox Business, Bloomberg TV, along with local TV and radio programs. He has also contributed to articles in *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Forbes*. Numismatic, educational, and commercial press organizations have recognized his superb promotional efforts more than 70 times. Federal agencies also value the wisdom he can share—he has served as an expert numismatic consultant to the U.S. Mint, Royal Canadian Mint, U.S. Post Office, Federal Trade Commission, and General Services Administration.

### **Crime Time: Suppressing the Dark Side**

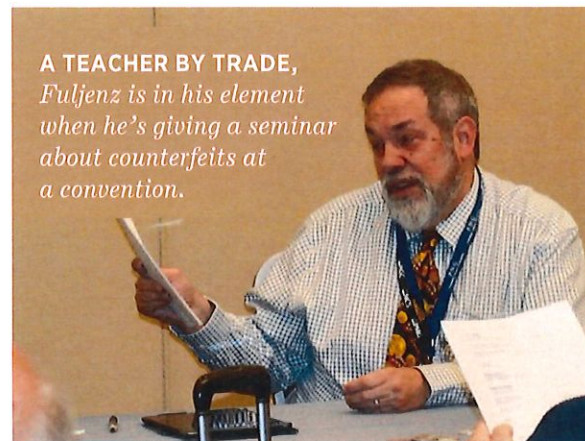
An energetic member of several organizations—including the Professional Numismatists Guild (PNG), Greater Houston Coin Club, and Florida United Numismatists—Fuljenz appreciates the camaraderie of fellow collectors at club meetings and conventions, but he is keenly aware that there’s a dark side to the hobby lurking in the shadows of

◀ **AT THE 2016** *World’s Fair of Money* (top), reporter Gayle Anderson interviewed Fuljenz about counterfeit coins and the problems they present. At the 2019 event (bottom), Fuljenz met up with Director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing Len Olijar and U.S. Mint Director David J. Ryder.

dealer cases and deceitful eBay listings.

Since the 1980s, he has worked diligently to assist law enforcement in apprehending those who sell counterfeit or misdescribed coins. He has teamed up with Doug Davis and the Numismatic Crime Information Center to teach classes for law-enforcement officers on crime prevention, and he also instructs numismatic novices about the hazards of making ignorant purchases. “I always stress to new people in the hobby to know their coin dealer. The best thing for anyone in the industry is to build a relationship with a reputable coin dealer, someone who is a member of the ANA, holds a position on industry boards, is involved in the behind-the-scenes workings of the hobby, and has been recognized for their service and achievements.”

He wants everyone’s experiences with the hobby to be fulfilling and profitable, which is why he serves as a member of the PNG Anti-Counterfeiting Task Force and Crime Stoppers of Southeast Texas. Both PNG and NCBA have recognized his outstanding efforts to combat counterfeits. His labors have returned millions of dollars to unsuspecting collectors and have expunged countless fakes from the market. “Counterfeiting is the largest criminal enterprise in the world, according to the U.S. and Canadian governments,” he says. “It doesn’t matter if it is a \$100 fake purse or millions in precious metals, it is personal to me because it hurts others, and it’s important for our country to reduce the distribution and harm of counterfeit goods.”



**A TEACHER BY TRADE,**  
*Fuljenz is in his element when he’s giving a seminar about counterfeits at a convention.*



A HERO TO MANY,  
*Fuljenz has dedicated  
much of his time over the  
past four decades to fighting  
numismatic crime.*

### **Donate & Advocate**

Fuljenz enjoys numerous successes and reaps many rewards, but he doesn't keep them to himself. He has a generous spirit and widely shares not only his knowledge and resources, but his time and profits too. He has donated material items and hundreds of thousands of dollars to the ANA in support of membership recruitment, young numismatists, awards programs, and the Edward C. Rochette Money Museum. He sponsored the ANA's annual award banquets and the Distinguished Service Award medal for seven years, and he continues to sponsor ANA conventions. Hundreds of Boy and Girl Scouts have earned their Coin Collecting merit badge through programs that he funded. Always one to support education in all forms, he is a founding member of the Friends of the National Numismatic Collection at the Smithsonian Institution and proudly endorses its widely

praised inaugural exhibit, *The Value of Money* ([americanhistory.si.edu/the-value-of-money](http://americanhistory.si.edu/the-value-of-money)).

Fuljenz knows the power a single voice can yield, and he regularly campaigns for anti-tax laws, forwarding the National Coin & Bullion Association's mission to obtain and preserve sales-tax exemptions for coins and precious metals in all states, which would encourage coin shows in more areas. Due to his advocacy, he saved the ANA from having to abandon Dallas as the site of the 2016 National Money Show®. NCBA has praised his efforts to prevent the imposition of sales tax on collectors and dealers in Texas and Louisiana—and this just scratches the surface of how Fuljenz has touched the places he has called home.

"My wife and I have been able to support with time, talent, and treasure numerous charities we believe in, like Meals on Wheels, Beaumont Independent School District Reading

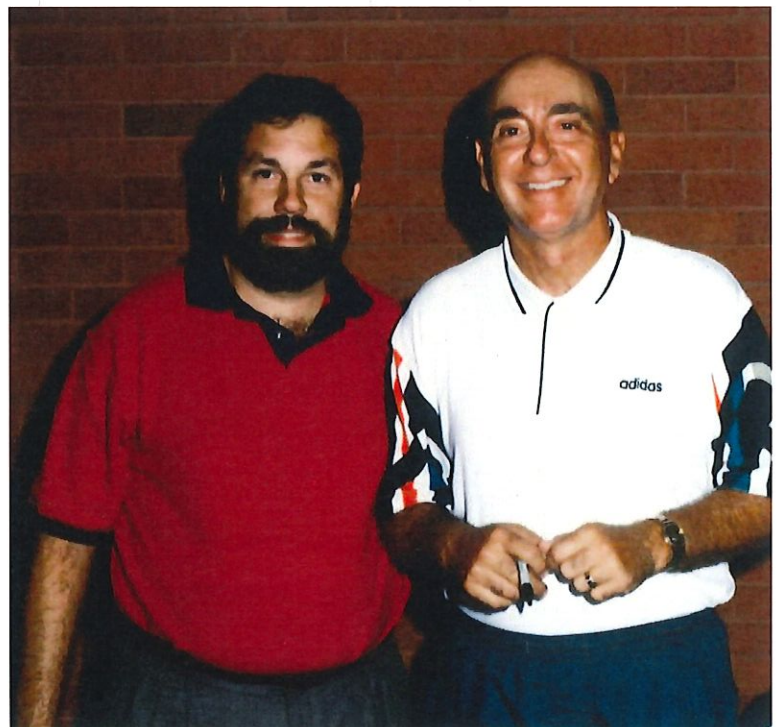
PHOTO: BEE PHOTOGRAPHY



Programs, and Catholic Charities,” he says. “I was able to work with two attorney generals of Texas, Greg Abbott and Ken Paxton, on developing numismatic consumer alerts, and assist two universities, Lamar and McNeese State.” The latter, Fuljenz’s alma mater, recognized his literary, business, and civic achievements with the school’s highest distinction, an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, in 2015. He has also been involved in his community’s youth sports leagues. Fuljenz credits numismatics with granting him the opportunity “to meet and befriend luminaries in other areas of interest, like college basketball great Dick Vitale, and to coach 25 youth girls’ and boys’ teams.”

PHOTOS: BEE PHOTOGRAPHY (PORTRAIT) & MIKE FULJENZ

▼ **BISHOP CURTIS GUILLORY** presented Fuljenz with the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the Catholic Charities of Southeast Texas in 2013 (top). Fuljenz sponsored legendary college basketball sportscaster Dick Vitale at Lamar University in 1995 (bottom).





Although Fuljenz switched the classroom for a boardroom many years ago, he has **never stopped** teaching.

PHOTOS: MIKE FULJENZ



▲ IN 2009 Fuljenz received the Hall of Honor award from McNeese State University Athletic Director Tommy McClelland (above). A sports fan and a family man, Fuljenz served as the coach of his daughter's soccer team for six years (top, right). He is pictured with his family—Karen, Kate, and Jake—at the bottom right.

### Once a Collector, Always a Teacher

Fuljenz's passion for education is reflected in his collecting interests. He enjoys U.S. classic silver commemoratives issued from 1892 to 1954 because of the tales they tell, and he owns the finest CAC commemorative sets in the country. His favorite issue is the Booker T. Washington half dollar, first struck in 1946, which memorializes one of Fuljenz's educational idols. "I've been involved in tutoring programs and reading programs for less fortunate kids and was inspired by Dr. Washington and his work," he says. "Washington was known as a great educator, and he was the first African American to appear on a legal-tender United States coin. He is one of the reasons I became a teacher, like my mother and grandmother." Although Fuljenz switched the classroom for a boardroom many years ago, he has never stopped teaching, and his commitment to numismatics is stronger than ever.

"The art, beauty, history, and allure of gold and silver attracted me to coins since I was a

young age," he says. "It's fun talking about coins, but looking at coins and seeing their beauty on a daily basis—that is thrilling." Like many, Fuljenz is a fan of original luster. His collecting philosophy is simple: "buy something you like and collect the best quality you can. As a friend of mine used to say, you might pay a little too much for the right coin, but you always pay too much for the wrong coin. I believe in that philosophy."

He also believes in consistency, action, and perseverance, as have many greats before him. He may not wear a cape, but he has come to the rescue innumerable times with his anti-counterfeiting and anti-tax efforts. As a numismatic missionary who spreads the good word about the hobby, leads a crusade against criminals, and gives generously to his community, he does indeed resemble a king with a castle full of doors, friends, honors, and riches—a king who knows that coins aren't the only gold to be treasured. ■