

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **Chamber Announces ATHENA Award Nominees**

HASTINGS, MI – The Barry County Chamber of Commerce has announced the receipt of two nominees for the second annual Barry County ATHENA Award. Both ATHENA nominees will be recognized and honored at the upcoming Chamber Annual Dinner on Tuesday, October 5, 2010 at the Middle Villa Inn in Middleville with the ATHENA Award recipient announced at the event.

The ATHENA Award celebrates exemplary leaders and honors outstanding business and professional individuals for excellence in their chosen field, for providing valuable service to their community and for actively assisting women in their attainment of professional goals and leadership skills. The program has grown to include organizations in hundreds of cities worldwide and has recognized over 5,000 ATHENA Award recipients with Barry County now added to that honor. This is the second year the Barry County Chamber of Commerce will recognize a local leader as an ATHENA Award Recipient.

Lani Forbes, Executive Director of the Barry County United Way was honored as the 2009 ATHENA Award Recipient and will forever hold the title as the first-ever Barry County ATHENA Award Recipient. Forbes' impressive leadership efforts were recognized by U.S. Congressman Vern Ehlers who submitted the ATHENA nomination. This year's nominees have also been nominated based on their personal leadership impacts in the lives of those they work with and engage with regularly. "The two ATHENA nominations we received this year certainly exceed the criteria of an ATHENA leader. It is a privilege for the Chamber of Commerce to have the opportunity to recognize such amazing women as mentors and leaders in Barry County with the internationally recognized honor of the ATHENA Award," said Valerie Byrnes, President of the Barry County Chamber of Commerce.

The two nominees for the 2010 ATHENA Award are Katherine Sheldon and Carla Wilson-Neil. "This is the type of recognition to be shared with friends, family and colleagues. Kathy and Carla should be surrounded by those that admire and appreciate them," Byrnes added. The Chamber encourages the public to attend the Chamber Annual Dinner to celebrate the recognition of the ATHENA nominees.

Katherine Sheldon, CPA/Partner of Walker, Fluke & Sheldon, PLC with offices in Hastings and Ionia was nominated by Kristie Welton, Amber Thompson and Julie Welton. As a senior partner in the firm of Walker, Fluke and Sheldon, Kathy has actively recruited women for both professional and support positions within the firm. She has coached and mentored these women to enable them to advance personally and professionally in their careers and their lives, including assisting CPA candidates in the preparation for the challenging CPA licensing examination. Kathy has set high expectations and leads by example. Kathy's volunteerism is diverse and extensive including active roles with the Barry County YMCA leading many fund

raising efforts to support programs benefiting local youth and over 10 years of active participation with the Barry County United Way Day of Caring notably recognized with the 2010 Volunteer Award from the Barry County United Way and Volunteer Center. Kathy unassumingly gives her time to operate a booth at the Chamber's Annual Golf Outing year after year.

"As a community leader, Kathy quietly takes the lead...she does this without needing to be asked but senses the need and timeframe while developing a plan to succeed. Her energy is endless. Her commitment to helping others without question and her dedication to making our community a better place to live is evident in her work, not only with her family and business but each agency she is involved with," noted one testimonial included in Kathy's ATHENA nomination. Kathy is the mother of three children, two daughters Kyleigh and McKayla and one son, Blake and is married to Mark.

Carla Wilson-Neil, Chief Operating Officer of Pennock Health Services was nominated by Sherri Thrasher and Robyn Todd. Carla's career journey at Pennock is an inspiration to all of the women at Pennock. Beginning her career as a unit secretary, her career goals were clear as was demonstrated through her progressive movement into management, directorship, and finally her current role as Chief Operating Officer. As a leader, Carla continues to communicate her vision in a way that colleagues at all levels of the organization can understand, and it is her humility that has earned the respect of the colleagues of Pennock. Working with 64 hospital departments/units, she oversees the quality and performance improvement functions of the organization. As a collaborative executive, she orchestrates change with physicians and specifically leads the employed physician arm of Pennock Health Services. She works closely with the Pennock Ventures Board of Directors and is responsible for the *for-profit* division of the organization. With creative and innovative talent, she was responsible for the implementation of the permanent MRI, digital mammography services, and provided the vision of the quality initiative for the organization's Baldrige Journey.

Carla was recognized with the "Distinguished Service Award" by the Pennock Board of Trustees in 2007 and currently serves as the Treasurer of the Barry County Economic Development Alliance Board of Directors, a role she has held for several years. Carla has one daughter, Misheaila Neil and married to husband Ron.

The Chamber will also recognize all the nominees for two Annual Chamber Awards: Exemplary Customer Service and the Brick Award. Chamber member organizations have been nominated and Award Recipients will be announced at the Annual Dinner. Reservations can be made to attend the annual dinner on October 5, 2010 by contacting the Chamber at 945-2454 or emailing Lynn Hatfield at [lynn@mibarry.com](mailto:lynn@mibarry.com). Annual dinner tickets are only \$30 for Chamber member and \$40 for non-members.

The Barry County Chamber of Commerce is a member-based non-profit organization dedicated to cultivating business and economic vibrancy in Barry County.

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