

Chamber News

"The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate."

-Oprah Winfrey

At this year's annual Chamber Dinner we celebrated your success. Members exemplified excellence in customer service as well as displayed the courage to renovate and expand. We also recognized lifetime achievements in leadership and community service with our ATHENA award nominees; Carla Wilson-Neil and Kathy Sheldon.

Members acknowledged for their excellent customer service included Brian and Courtney Appel of **Brian Appel Builders**, the agents and staff of **Buckland Insurance Agency**, Randy Hart and his exceptional personnel at **Diamond Propane**, the wonderful quartet of Doug and Lyndy Acker and Bob and Jenny King at **Progressive Graphics**, Sandra Marcukaitis and the employees of **Yankee Springs Golf Course** and owner Kristina Laux and her team at the women's boutique, **The Hanger**.

Just as encouraging are the stories of businesses expanding and opening new doors. Audrey Van Strien was recognized for her commercial developments in downtown Middleville, including her latest venture, **The Scoop Ice Cream Shoppe**. **Barry County Telephone** and **MEI Wireless** were cited for their investment of over \$1.9 million in infrastructure to expand the availability of broadband internet services in Barry County. **Pennock Health Services** brought new life to the Viatic Building, with the relocation of **Pennock Hospice and Home Care**. Long time downtown Hastings business, **Progressive Graphics** refurbished their storefront with a fresh new look. A fantastic addition to a main corner in downtown Hastings is the new Italian style restaurant **Seasonal Grille**. With the assistance of building owners Bill and Irene Cook, Seasonal Grille owner, Justin Straube has added a beautiful brick façade to the corner of Church and State Street. Lastly, **Yankee Springs Golf Course** was saved from foreclosure by the Tichvon family and is back in operation with over 30 full and part time employees.

Finally, we come to our ATHENA Award. The ATHENA Award is internationally recognized; reserved for the highest caliber of candidates, who exemplify the characteristics of the ATHENA Leadership Model. The two nominees were **Carla Wilson-Neil**, Chief Operating Officer of Pennock Health Services and **Kathy Sheldon**, partner at accounting firm Walker, Fluke and Sheldon. To learn about their dedication to business excellence, community activism through various boards and volunteerism and most importantly their support and love of family, made for an unforgettable night.

Congratulations to all of you! Your energy and vision are an inspiration to us all! As we turn the calendar to 2011, remember these victories your fellow members created. Help it to inspire you to new heights as well.

On behalf of the Barry County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Alliance Boards and staff, thank you for your support and have a Happy Holidays.



ATHENA award winners Carla Wilson-Neil (2010) & Lani Forbes (2009)



Board Member Deb Button with Pat Buckland, accepting the Customer Service award for Buckland Insurance Agency.



Chamber President Valerie Byrnes with ATHENA award nominee Kathy Sheldon

IT'S IN OUR NATURE

New Member Spotlight!

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New Member Spotlight!

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Investing in Kids, 2011 Economic Outlook and Special Guest Highlight Economic Summit

To insure a stronger economy for our future, W.E. Upjohn Institute's Senior Economist, Dr. Timothy Bartik advocated for dedicated investment in early childhood development. Drawing from his own and other scholar's findings, Bartik showed that test scores and other measurements indicate significant improvements are made when children enroll in either public or private preschool programs. Bartik's presentation, "Investing in Kids: Early Childhood Programs and Local Economic Development", stressed the importance of including early childhood programs in current economic planning. He pointed out that educational opportunity for young children does impact the parental labor supply; including the fact that there are more and better jobs for parents if early childhood development programs are available for young children. Bartik believes this is a serious quality of life issue which has

ramifications for both employment and earning levels. In conclusion, education of young children brings "high bang for the buck and has short- and long-term benefits in both the education of the children and the work experience of the parents." said Bartik. His presentation was sponsored by Barry County's own Barry Great Start Collaborative. For further information about the collaborative, visit www.barrygreatstart.org

Economist Brad Watts, also from the W.E. Upjohn Institute, concluded the Summit with a gamut of regional economic data. While the statistics confirmed what many of us are experiencing first hand, the precipitous decline of our economy, Watt's presentation can be cushioned with the message given by newly elected Lieutenant Governor, our current State Representative Brian Calley. Calley, fresh off his gubernatorial win as Governor elect Rick

Snyder's running mate, made a special visit to the Summit and addressed the packed crowd with a similar message that garnered the Snyder/Calley team their landslide victory. Calley indicated the new administration's plans are to support business friendly legislation, bring a new bipartisan spirit to Lansing and pay close attention to the health and vibrancy of our state's urban and rural communities.

The Barry County Economic Development Alliance would like

to thank the sponsors who made the Economic Development Summit possible. Platinum sponsors were Consumers Energy, Barry County Telephone and Message Express Internet, Barry Great Start Collaborative; Gold sponsors included Chemical Bank, Commercial Bank, Firstbank, Gun Lake Casino, J-Ad Graphics, Lake Trust Credit Union, Union Bank, Pennock Health Services and Silver sponsor Walker, Fluke & Sheldon, PLC.

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IT'S IN OUR NATURE

New Barry Business Celebration and Expo a Huge Success!

With more than 30 booths and hundreds of guests, the first Barry Business Celebration and Expo was a huge success. Industries represented included aerospace, banking, child development, education, employment staffing, energy, health and wellness, home improvement, hospitality, insurance, leadership training, manufacturing, photonics, retail, technology and telecommunications. The Expo demonstrated that Barry County not only has a number of vibrant companies but has a healthy diversity too. Given this advantage and the number of innovators, entrepreneurs and agencies that were on display, Barry County is well positioned for success in 2011.

Recently, in an op-ed in *The Reminder*, Barry County Economic Development Alliance Board Chairman, Mr. Fred Jacobs cited the legendary "Acres of Diamonds" speech by Temple University founder Russell H. Conwell. Conwell is best known for his fervent belief that every community is ripe with opportunity; no matter their circumstances. If you lived in Michigan these past few years, you would think our situation would be an exception to Conwell's seemingly unrealistic expectations. Yet, if you took a stroll through the Expo you would have witnessed the Gilmore Car Works harnessing the energy of our youth, the innovation of Soaring Concepts

Aerospace, Message Express Internet expanding countywide Wi-Fi service, and many other Expo participants meeting the needs of their customers. We are proud to say, Barry County companies are proving Conwell's proclamation to be true today as it was in the early 20th Century.

A sincere "Thank You!" to our Expo partners, Barry Expo Center and W.B.C.H. radio, booth participants and most importantly our guests whose attendance made this event a great success!



Lieutenant Governor Elect,
Representative Brian Calley
& E.D.A. Board Chairman
Fred Jacobs



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