

Hope for a new year Chamber kicks off 2011 with new board

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Article published on Thursday, Jan. 27, 2011

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PINELLAS PARK – The business community of Pinellas Park rallied for the new year Jan. 22 with an annual dinner that installed a new board of directors for the Pinellas Park/Gateway Chamber of Commerce and celebrated some of its members with awards.

Along with a new board, the chamber also welcomed its new chairman, Paul Ziegler, BB&T vice president and head of the bank branch at the Roosevelt Financial Center.

“This community is strong and it’s just going to get stronger. It’s an honor to have an impact on Pinellas Park and the gateway to Pinellas County,” Ziegler said.

White checkered racing flags decorated the dinner tables at the event and helped define its theme.

“We picked this ‘Businesses, start your engines’ theme because I think it really exemplifies the feeling, the power and the strength of our business community. The positives. We’ve heard so much in the negative in the last three years, especially with the financial meltdown,” Ziegler said. “We’re getting real tired of it.”

He shared several headlines featuring statistics that forecast a better business climate: year-end homes sales up in Tampa Bay, a rise in retails sales six months in a row and a better job market.

He, like many others throughout the evening, encouraged the business community to join the chamber so it could continue to develop a better economic climate for the Pinellas Park business community.

The chamber sold 110 seats for the dinner, said board member Tim Caddell, who acted as the evening’s emcee.

Among the first order of business was naming the 2011 Citizen of the Year: longtime Pinellas Park resident Michael Scavelli. He was honored for his various contributions to the community, including his role leading the Pinellas Park Knights of Columbus.

“He has directed it to a financial stability that allows them to make many substantial donations to schools, scholarship foundations, food pantries, community projects,” Pinellas Park Councilman Rick Butler said, reading the bio written by fellow Councilman Ed Taylor. “When the city set aside land for a small park on 49th Street and Park Boulevard, it was Mike and the Knights who installed a flag pole there and dedicated it to our police, fire and military heroes.”



Photo by JULIANA A. TORRES

Chamber Chairman Paul Ziegler, left, and event emcee Tim Caddell, also a board member, name Hope Peterson, of New Hope Auto Truck Service, as the Business Woman of the Year during the Pinellas Park/Gateway Chamber of Commerce annual meeting and installation ceremony Jan. 22.

He also was praised for his involvement with Celebrate Pinellas Park, which plans the city's Christmas parade; Sacred Heart Catholic Church and People Helping People.

"Unlike most of us that just join things, Mike truly becomes them. With his participation, commitment and enthusiasm, our city and community are a better place to live, work and play," Butler concluded.

Scavelli said he was speechless as he accepted the award.

"Thanks and I enjoy what I do, helping others in the community," he said.

Jacob Andrew Conley, a sophomore at Pinellas Park High School, was chosen as the chamber's Youth Citizen of the Year.

Conley, who moved to Pinellas Park with his family in 2009, became a member of the Pinellas Park Police Explorer Club in August that year and through the youth organization has put in "hundreds of community service hours for the city," Caddell said.

"Since that time, he was motivated to become the best Explorer he could be," Caddell said. "He has become a role model for new Explorers for the post."

Conley has volunteered his time to help with Pinellas Park events, including Country in the Park, Holiday in the Park, the holiday parade, Relay for Life and road clean ups. He was not present to accept the award.

The chamber also recognized two business people within the community. Hope Peterson, of New Hope Auto Truck Service, was named Business Woman of the Year.

"I'm going to imagine you're all naked, OK?" tittered a nervous Peterson as she accepted the award.

"I wear dresses like once every 10 years, really, and I get an award too," the auto mechanic admitted, spinning to show off the red folds of the skirt. "I'm so humbled and grateful."

Walt Morey, of Core Business Solutions, was named Business Man of the Year.

"All I try to do is help people, particularly business people, to promote their businesses," he told the audience. "Whatever we can do to improve, help our members, helps community in the long run. And I believe strongly in that."

Retiring board member Noreen Hodges was honored for more than 10 years of service on the chamber board. Girls Incorporated of Pinellas was recognized as the Charitable Organization of the Year. Community Development Coordinator Jennifer Shtab, who admitted to being new to the position, accepted the award.

Several times during the evening, chamber members and speakers thanked and praised the Vincent House, whose members catered the professionally prepared dinner. Vincent House member and pianist Justin Shea played during the social hour and later acted as DJ and directed sound the presentations.

In a final, light-hearted presentation, Ziegler introduced each member of the board with an iconic song recorded from vinyl records, each tune designed to help the audience remember the director associated with it.

“With the team behind me right here, it’s going to be a great year,” Ziegal said.

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