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CHAMBER LOOKS BACK ON ‘TREMENDOUS’ YEAR DURING ANNUAL DINNER

Uniontown, PA - Commemorating its 98th year representing the business community, the Fayette Chamber of Commerce celebrated what Executive Director Muriel Nuttall called a “tremendous year” during its annual dinner Nov. 30 at Lakeside Venues.

“It’s been interesting, and it’s been so very busy,” Nuttall said of the past 12 months.

She said at the chamber, it feels as though life and business are settling into a semblance of post-COVID normalcy, though many things are different these days. Nuttall noted that some of the traditions of the past are being revived throughout the county, “but there’s a different focus now. Our community is really looking at the way they spend their time and their dollars and putting our local businesses in the forefront as they focus on their families.

The primary theme of the dinner was the challenge of looking at Fayette County from a different perspective, saying that differences of opinion often come down to point of view and considering situations from other people’s perspectives. She shared her own perspective on Fayette County, that of what she likes to call “Pride in Place.”

“I love the county I live in – rural Appalachia, with all of its quirks,” she said.

Nuttall’s love for the area was reflected by many of those in attendance at the dinner, including chamber President Connie Slampak, who said she has seen a number of positive changes happening this year.

“This year has been amazing,” she said. “I’ve been with the chamber for a long time, but this year just topped everything we’ve ever done. I see so many new and wonderful things happening. I keep looking forward and looking up, and I see the changes in the county. It’s wonderful to see.”

A significant goal of the annual dinner was recognizing those who have brought about some of those positive changes. Awards were presented to several individuals and organizations for their contributions to the county and its residents.

Awards included:

- **Herman M. Buck Award** – named for a local attorney, the award is presented to a younger member of the chamber of commerce, typically under the age of 45, who has exhibited an extraordinary commitment to the community. Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Laurel Region, Fayette County Community Relations and Mentoring Coordinator Brittany Cooley received this year’s award, calling it “shocking, amazing. I can’t say enough incredible things about the group at the chamber.”

- **Small Business(es) of the Year** – the award was presented to Steve and Ashley Smolenski, a couple who each started a business of their own and are seeing them thrive. Ashley Smolenski owns The Grayson House, a wedding venue in the countryside just outside Uniontown. Steve Smolenski owns electric bike company JoltBike.
- **Non-Profit of the Year** – Terry Vassar and Jaime Bittner accepted this award for One Voice One Community, an organization based in Uniontown and launched this year, dedicated to providing resources to help break the cycle of poverty and violence in Fayette County and to assisting those most in need. “It’s an absolute honor” Bittner said of the award, while Vassar noted the chamber has been a solid support system for the organization.
- **Business Achievement (Individual) Award** – Don Aller of the Silvis Group accepted this award, saying he was able to do what he does because, “the relationships that I had with the staff at the chamber helped connect me with other businesses.”
- **Customer Service Award** – Mary Ann Means, restaurant supervisor at the Hilton Garden Inn Uniontown, and Paul Vis of Marcon Building Supply in Markleysburg both earned this honor with their unwavering dedication to their customers and guests. “It’s the biggest surprise I think I’ve ever had in my life,” Means said. “I enjoy working at the Hilton Garden Inn. I think I have the best bosses possible.”
- **Chamber Impact Award** – “Honored and humbled” to receive this year’s award were Mary Over, chief of staff for Fayette County Commissioner Vince Vicites; and Tammy Nedrow, chief of staff for Commissioner Scott Dunn.
- **Community Champion** – Kelly Trott of Adventures with Kelly also was surprised to find herself an award recipient. “It’s just a personal blog to showcase some of the things to do and the beauty of the area,” she said. Trott also is among those who recently restarted a Parks and Recreation board in Uniontown, which she said will be taking over the Uniontown farmers market next year.
- **Workforce Champion** – WVU Medicine Uniontown Hospital Director of Community Relations Josh Krysak was “very honored to be recognized. I do what I do because I care about our community.”

All of the honorees share Nuttall’s pride in Fayette County and determination to foster and focus on the positive things happening, something she said is more important than ever.

“Look at things in a way that says, ‘I love where I live.’ And then tell people about it,” she said. “Help them see your point of view.”

The Fayette Chamber of Commerce serves as the county’s largest and most active business advocacy, marketing, and workforce development organization. The Fayette Chamber and affiliate organization, the Greater Brownsville Area Chamber of Commerce, together boast a membership of nearly 700 businesses, organizations, and individuals. To learn more about the Fayette Chamber, visit www.fayettechamber.com.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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