



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
CONTACT: friendwood@icloud.com

## **FRIENDS OF FLEETWOOD PARKS ANNOUNCES AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE WITH FLEETWOOD'S FINEST SPRING GALA**

OCTOBER 15, 2024 – Friends of Fleetwood Parks will host a spring gala on March 8, 2025, honoring outstanding citizens. The gala will include the presentation of two new community awards: **THE FLEETWOOD CADILLAC AWARD** for Outstanding Community Service by an organization or business, and **THE FLEETWOOD HOMETOWN HERO AWARD** to an individual or individuals who have contributed exceptionally to the community over the years.

**FLEETWOOD'S FINEST SPRING GALA** will take place on Saturday, March 8<sup>th</sup> at the Fleetwood Fire Co. Social Quarters Banquet Hall on Franklin Street in Fleetwood.

“Fleetwood just celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary last year and we wanted to continue to celebrate the town and all the special people who have made it what it is today,” stated Patty Keeney, President of Friends of Fleetwood Parks. “We’re excited to introduce this new annual tradition and look forward to celebrating these exceptional individuals.”

Fleetwood has had a long association with the Cadillac. Fleetwood Auto Body began business on April 1, 1909, and continued as an independent automobile body builder until acquired in 1925 by the Fisher Body Company, a division of General Motors. The company continued in Fleetwood until 1931 at which time General Motors moved the entire operation to Detroit. Eventually, under Fisher’s directives, the company also made production models with the celebrated Fleetwood name. General Motors’ most notable Cadillac model was the “Fleetwood” until it was recently discontinued. Long before acquisition by Fisher Body Company, the Fleetwood Metal Body Company had established its reputation as a builder of fine wood and aluminum auto bodies. Its built-to-order product was sought after by many notables both here and abroad, some of whom were royalty from India and Japan, presidents of Poland and the United States and some well-known American movie idols. One, built for silent screen star Rudolph Valentino, was recently on sale for \$1,600,000.00. The award is named to honor this classic memory and connection to Fleetwood.

**THE FLEETWOOD CADILLAC AWARD** will be presented to the **Fleetwood Volunteer Fire Company** for their extraordinary service to the community since 1914. The fire company proudly protects over 4,000 residents in Fleetwood Borough and assists departments in the mutual aid response area. The company operates out of one station that provides fire, rescue, and Quick Response Services to over 1,300 homes,

three schools, five churches and an industrial area. The company is a public department whose members are volunteer. The fire department also has in place a junior fire fighter program which starts at the age of 14. **John Manmiller** currently serves as the Fire Chief of this all-volunteer organization.

“We’re thrilled to be receiving this inaugural FLEETWOOD CADILLAC AWARD for extraordinary community service. All our members are volunteers who give and support this special place,” stated Manmiller. “It’s an honor to be recognized by our community that we serve and we’re all proud to call Fleetwood our home.”

**THE FLEETWOOD HOMETOWN HERO AWARD** will be presented to **Barney Dietrich, Ernie Fink and R. Joel Schaeffer** for building the Little League Field in 1965 with the Fleetwood Jaycees. Since 1965, the Little League Field – now known as Smith Field – has hosted thousands of baseball games for the youth in the community. Their vision led to this addition in the Fleetwood area which has lasted almost 60 years.

“It’s all a little overwhelming. We just wanted to build something special for the kids in our town and it’s wonderful that after almost 60 years, it is still going strong. My great grandson now plays on the field every summer,” said R. Joel Schaeffer.

**Barney Dietrich**, age 91, served as the first Chairman of the Fleetwood Council of Community Organizations (FCCO) for five years, overseeing the Fleetwood Centennial Celebration. He also was a founding member of Breakfast Brothers and was a Fleetwood Jaycee, having served as their President for a year. He worked on the Fleetwood Hill Climb, Halloween parades, and the building of the Little League Field as well as running the community park’s concession stand. In his late teens he joined the Fleetwood Drum & Bugle Corps and was an Assistant Director of the Corps.

**Ernie Fink**, age 84, served as a Fleetwood Jaycee from 1961–1972. He also served on the Little League and Hill Climb committees as well as the Halloween Parade and Picnics in the Parks committees. Throughout his life, Ernie served as a Fleetwood Area High School band trip chaperone for almost ten years. He was part of the St. Paul’s Lutheran Church choir and church council. He served on the Dunkle’s Church Cemetery board from 2000 until 2022. Ernie has been a member of the Masonic Lodge, Rajah Shrine, and Scottish Rite for over 40 years. Since the early 2000’s, Ernie spent many hours sharing his singing talent with others as part of the Rajah Shrine Chanters, Pretzel City Barbershop Chorus, The Barnstormers, and the Greater Reading Singing Chorus.

**R. Joel Schaeffer**, age 93, was born and raised in Fleetwood. He is a Korean War veteran where he served with his best friend, Barney Dietrich. He served on the Fleetwood Borough Council for two terms, where he served as President during the 1973 Centennial Celebration. He also served on the Fleetwood Planning Commission as well as the Fleetwood Borough Authority. During these years, he was a member of Breakfast Brothers as well as a member of the Fleetwood Jaycees, serving as the President. He was also the Committee Chairman to build the Little League field in Fleetwood in 1965. He taught at Fleetwood High School from 1963-1986.

The gala includes Red Carpet Arrivals, Cocktail Hour, Dinner, Special Award Tributes along with Desserts and Dancing featuring the musical talents of The Josh Squared Duo. Tickets are \$50 and VIP Tickets are \$75 and will be available for purchase beginning November 18<sup>th</sup>. For additional information or to purchase tickets go to [fleetwoodparks.com](http://fleetwoodparks.com).

FLEETWOOD’S FINEST SPRING GALA is sponsored by **Breidegam Family Foundation** with additional support from **ANITATrinket, Breakfast Brothers, Fleetwood Bank, F.M. Brown’s Sons, Hurtson/Schaeffer** and **Beth Pile**.

The FLEETWOOD FINEST GALA COMMITTEE is chaired by Eric Schaeffer and includes residents and businesses in Fleetwood. The committee includes Jessica Galeassi – *Fleetwood Bank*; Donna Fick; Anita Tempesco – *ANITA Trinket*; Patty Keeney – *Friends of Fleetwood Parks*; Connie Keller; Lynn Kopicz; Mike Mayer- Fleetwood Borough Council, *Breakfast Brothers*; Joel & Kelly Schaeffer; William Strause – *Fleetwood Historical Society*; and Belinda Stoudt – *Fleetwood Vol. Fire Co.*

#####