

31st annual Spirit of Keokuk Awards honors Smith, Glasscock, Etter, and Joy

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Friday evening marked the 31st annual Spirit of Keokuk Awards held by the Keokuk Area Chamber of Commerce (KACC), Keokuk Area Economic Development Corporation (KAEDC), The Keokuk Area Convention and Tourism Bureau (KACTB), and Main Street Keokuk, Inc. (MSKI), with over 130 people in attendance.

The award ceremony is always combined with the annual meeting of the four non-profits in Keokuk to celebrate growth and achievement within the community and outline each group's goals for the year. While the meeting recognizes the achieve-

ments of the non-profits during the year, the Spirit of Keokuk Awards recognizes individuals and organizations who have gone above and beyond to make a difference in Keokuk.

Award recipients were selected based on their contributions to the city and its citizens through philanthropy, inspiration, day-to-day commitment to improving local society, spurring economic vitality, or providing opportunities for community members.

It was a night of celebration as the four community organizations recognized their leadership and volunteers. Emcee, Mike Greenwald, opened the event and invited KACTB board member Pam Bierwirth



PHOTO COURTESY OF KIRA KRUSZYNSKI

Spirit of Keokuk Award winners Amy Smith, Suzy Glasscock, Lennie Etter, and Brian Joy at the award ceremony Thursday night.

to the podium. Pam Bierwirth, followed by Bethany Shinn, KACC President, Kerry Klepfer, KEDC President, and Amy Hobbs, MSKI President, each spoke about their organizations' bodies of

work, the leaders that spearhead community economic development efforts, the challenges they face, and the successes they celebrate.

For the first time, the non-profits decided to share the list

of nominees with the community to highlight the good work that has been going on in the city beyond the four award winners. The individuals

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and organizations that were nominated were: Roslyn Garcia, Acts 2:45 Closet, 3DB Productions, Devon Dade, Trish Payne, Meyers Courtyard, Adam Kraus, Jadyan Messenger, Josh & Dan Rose, Jackie Schmeiser, Amy Smith, Brian Joy, Lennie Etter, St John's Episcopal Church, Suzy Glasscock, Jay Scott, QMG Keokuk, Kathie Mahoney, and Courtney McVeigh.

Pam Bierwirth, on behalf of KACTB, presented the first Spirit of Keokuk award to Suzy Glasscock. For the last 20 years, Suzy G has been the voice of KOKX. As the morning host, she has become an invaluable morning companion, bringing small-town information, culture, and news to households and individuals. Her levity brings joy, her wisdom brings growth, and her connections foster community cohesion.

Suzy's commitment and generosity extend well beyond KOKX. For 16 years, she worked tirelessly to lead and promote the Wreaths Across America (WAA) program. WAA coordinates wreath-laying ceremonies for veterans in cemeteries across the world. Suzy brought this moving and meaningful event to Keokuk's own National Cemetery. She coordinated with the community to organize efforts, collect donations, and order wreaths. Suzy was always the first to walk through the cemetery gates to lay all the wreaths on the soldiers' graves. She never tired of it; it was her passion, and she was proud to be part of such an organization.

The KACC President, Bethany Shinn, presented Brian Joy the next Spirit of Keokuk Award. Brian, a Keokuk native, is known for the saying, "Bloom where you are planted." He is always

thinking of ways to promote the community. Brian leaves his mark not only on residential and commercial properties around town but also on community members. He has repeatedly pointed out that "it takes a village" to get things done without taking full credit for all the work he invests in Keokuk. He has spent countless hours on stilts for various events to inject fun and enthusiasm into events. Brian lifts those around him and takes pride in his work and the people of Keokuk.

Kerry Klepfer, President of KAEDC, presented Lennie Etter with the third Spirit of Keokuk Award. Lennie has contributed his time, talent, and expertise toward economic vitality in the community. "He is always there when you need a helping hand," Kirk Brandenberger said.

Lennie has volun-

teered in the community by raising money through acting, singing, and dancing for Kardiac Kapers; he puts on a great show. He has assisted with the KHS sports, homecoming, and activities. In addition, he has raised money for the scouts. Lennie is renowned for his 4th of July fireworks that have drawn thousands of people to Keokuk. As a retired Keokuk police officer, he wore his badge of courage to protect the citizens and was an outstanding patrolman.

MSKI President Amy Hobbs presented Amy Smith with the final Spirit of Keokuk Award. Amy has provided a heartfelt account of her personal experience of homelessness and being a single mother of four children as she has taken the lead in tackling homelessness in the Keokuk community with the Keokuk Homeless Alliance. Words fail to describe

her deep passion for community connection and love for others. Amy did more than just speak about her experience; she organized a task force and fundraiser to help open a homeless shelter in Keokuk, which raised thousands of dollars. Amy is a humble community servant and doesn't expect anything in return.

The Spirit of Keokuk nominations opened in January 2023, with applications available for community members to nominate individuals or organizations that have significantly contributed to their time, talent, and expertise toward economic vitality in the Keokuk area. Participants were encouraged to answer how their nominee helped shape a more positive future for the Keokuk area by creating jobs or making the community a more attractive place for people to live, invest, shop, or spend their leisure time.

Nominee entries were then ranked on a five-point scale by three board members from each of the four sponsoring organizations. Nominees were graded based on the written applications alone. The more detailed the nomination, the more the scoring committee could use in their judging. Those with the top four scores became this year's Spirit of Keokuk award winners.

The four organizations encourage community members to become engaged, volunteer, and look for those in Keokuk to be recognized for their efforts to make a difference. Nominations for the 2024 awards will open in January 2024. Information about nominations will be available on the Keokuk Area Chamber or Main Street Keokuk, Inc.'s website and social media pages.