



Connie Dart named to Chamber Hall of Fame

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Eight local businesses, one individual, Chase County Schools and Mid-Plains Community College received recognition last week for their contributions to the Imperial community.

Chamber President Matt Hanna presented the Business Recognition Awards during a Chamber after-hours reception Tuesday, May 11, at Pinnacle Bank.

The recognition awards are presented as part of Imperial's economic development strategy. Leslie Carlholm, community development director for Imperial, said retaining and expanding existing businesses represent a key element in economic development strategy.

These businesses are responsible for most of the new jobs and capital investment in the community.

As a result, she said it's vital to recognize the accomplishment of these businesses for their efforts.

The business retention and expansion program include several partners—the Imperial Chamber of Commerce, the City of Imperial, Chase County Schools and Mid-Plains Community College.

This makes the second year for the awards.

Special Recognition Award

This award recognizes Chamber businesses that have invested in new or expanded facilities and/or job creation and retention.

Frenchman Valley Co-op earned this award for their investment in the community with their new building and the creation of new jobs.

Formed here in 1968, the cooperative now spans from McCook to eastern Wyoming with more than 20 locations.

It has grown from \$1.5 million in sales to \$400 million.

Rising Star Award

This award recognizes those Chamber businesses in operation for less than five years who have brought new or improved products or services to the area.

This year, two businesses were honored—A+ Brokerage and Holiday Farms.

The Imperial office of A+ Brokerage was opened in June, 2006. The local branch is staffed by Lynette Meeske and Kelsie Owens.

The business is owned by Tammy Buffington of Lincoln and specializes in lines of health, life, disability, long-term care insurance and annuities.

Holiday Farms originally started in 1996 as an FFA project. Owner Matt Vlasin returned to Imperial and reopened the business after earning a degree in landscape design and

greenhouse management.

The business, located on East 5th, features a large greenhouse, with the addition of a smaller one this year. Vlasin also offers landscaping, mowing and K-Lawn lawn care.

Best Store Front/Most

Improved Business

Property Award

This award recognizes Chamber businesses that have made substantial improvements to their store front or business property in the last 12-18 months.

Hill's Family Foods received the award this year.

They freshened the look of their store with a new paint job, newly painted signage and replacement of broken sidewalk on the north side of the store.

Other improvements include a repaved parking lot and new equipment in the store.

Customer Service Award

This award recognizes Chamber businesses that excel in their customer service and going the extra mile to make out-of-town shoppers and visitors feel welcome.

This year's award goes to Fine Things Jewelry and Gifts.

Merrilyn Leibbrandt established the store in 1999. The store offers a full line of diamond and gemstone jewelry, watches, gifts and other jewelry lines.

They believe every customer, no matter age, gender or appearance receives the same friendly, caring attention, regardless of the size of the sale.

The Good Neighbor Award

This award recognizes owners and/or employees of Chamber businesses who contribute their time and talents to the community through volunteerism.

The two businesses receiving this award include the staff and owners of The Imperial Republican and the staff and owners of Imperial Super Foods.

Republican staff and owners believe in community service demonstrated by participating in numerous boards, civic organizations, church committees and more.

The longevity of the eight staff members at the Republican totals more than 167 years and co-publishers Russ and Lori Pankonin have been involved in the family business for nearly 30 years.

Brad and Jill Moline have placed a great emphasis on youth activities by either sponsoring, organizing or coaching youth leagues, fun runs, Pom Poms and CCS athletic teams.

They are also supporters of many civic groups and churches in the community and have several employees who dedicate their time to organizations, such as the fire department.

Best Foot Forward Award

This award is reserved for a Chamber business that has done something really special in the past year.

Harchelroad Motors received the award this year for their incredible recovery from a mid-October fire that destroyed the headquarters of their operation.

They reopened for business on the next Monday, operating out of their inside showroom across the street. The building has been converted to house the operation during a transition to a new facility.

This marks the 75th year of operation of Harchelroad Motors.

Partners in Success Award

This award recognized two or more Chamber members for working together to strengthen their operations and improving the community.

This year's winners are Chase County Schools and Mid-Plains Community College for the creation of the Career Academy.

This unique partnership allows high school students participating in the program to attend CCS for an additional year, taking college-credit classes.

Students not only get their high school diploma but can obtain their associates degree through Mid-Plains after just one more year of studies.

From there, students can obtain bachelor's degrees through on-line partnerships with four-year colleges and universities.

Hall of Fame Award

This award recognizes a Chamber member who has made significant contributions both to the community and chamber over a period of more than 10 years.

Former Chamber president Connie Dart was inducted to the Chamber's Hall of Fame this year.

She served as Chamber president in 2007 and 2008 and has worked closely with the city on a variety of projects, including the "Shop at Home" campaign.

In addition to Chamber activities, she is a member of the Imperial United Methodist Church, Enders Women's Fellowship, Freedoms Foundation of Valley Forge and Imperial Family and Community Education Club.

She is a long-time employee of Adams Lumber Company.