



Business owners and others affiliated with the business who received Chamber awards of recognition last week were, from left, Eric Moreland, Bruce Dowse, Brenda Ledall, Nick Colton, Julie Hansen, Russ

Pankonin, Lori Owens, Stacy Leibhart, Sue Moore, Nick Schultz, Patty Lueth, Lisa Bremer and Beth Bremer. Not pictured—Jim and Linda Pirog. (Republican photo)

# Chamber recognizes members for improvements, service

*Sue Moore is this year's Hall of Fame recipient*

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Eight Imperial Chamber of Commerce members, and one non-member, took center stage last week at the chamber's 2011 business retention and recognition program.

Held as part of an after-hours business social May 11, chamber business owners and employees gathered at Pinnacle Bank.

Chamber member Alex McNair announced the award winners and a little about each business and why the award was received.

Chamber members nominated fellow business owners which formed an initial list of nominees. From that list, a final vote was taken with the top vote-getter in each category named the award winner.

Each recipient received a glass etched award, presented by Merrillyn Leibbrandt, Chamber treasurer. This was the third year for the Chamber recognition program.

This annual chamber awards program also has support from the city of Imperial, which contributed \$2,500 for 2011 and 2012.

Leslie Carlholm, Imperial's community development director, said retaining and expanding existing businesses represents a key element in economic development strategy. She said it's vital to recognize the accomplishments of local businesses for their efforts and service in the community.

Staff from Pinnacle Bank provided the refreshments.

Here is a short summary on each of the award winners.

## Hall of Fame Award

Twenty-eight-year chamber member Sue Moore received the Hall of Fame Award, reserved for individual business owners (but not limited to) who have made a significant contribution both to the community and the chamber for a period over 10 years.

Moore served as chamber president twice, in 1993 and 1998, and is one of the original

chairmen for Art in the Park (along with Mr. C and Rod Einspahr). She continued to chair that event for the next 10 years.

She chaired the November arts and crafts fair nine years, co-chaired the Christmas lighting contest four years and the fair parade committee six years. She currently serves on the chamber's promotions committee and is on its board of directors.

Previous recipients have been Connie Dart and Don Newman.

## Rising Star Award

Brickstone Grille & Sports Bar received the Rising Star Award, given to a business in operation less than five years.

To be considered, businesses should provide a new or improved product or service and be considered a good corporate neighbor.

Brickstone opened last October at 415 Broadway under the ownership of Lisa and Beth Bremer. With a staff of 15 people, Brickstone strives to provide quality food and service in a comfortable, family-friendly atmosphere.

Twelve big screen TVs were installed, and they host graduation, birthday and Christmas parties, and the broadcasting of Husker football games and other sporting events is quite popular.

## Special Recognition Award

Chase County Community Hospital received the Special Recognition Award for the installation of its digital mammogram service.

The hospital installed a fully digital mammography system in September, 2009. Highly detailed results are produced more quickly with less radiation exposure with this equipment, and by having it locally, patients do not have to travel hundreds of miles. Mammograms are offered Monday through Friday at the hospital by appointment.

This award recognizes businesses that have invested in new or expanded facilities or major equipment upgrades. Other factors considered are job creation/retention, as well as being a good corporate neighbor.

## Good Neighbor Award

Nick Schultz, owner of Schultz Construction the past 28 years, is the 2011 Chamber Good Neighbor Award recipient. He was recognized for the personal time and professional expertise he volunteered for the handicap-accessible restroom construction in Campbell Park.

As a member of the Imperial Lions Club, which spearheaded the project, he said it was evident when costs were put together on the construction, it would require a lot of donated time. He oversaw the construction of the project, also aided by several fellow Lions members and others.

The Good Neighbor Award recognizes chamber business owners and/or employees who have made an overwhelming contribution of their time and talents to the community.

## Customer Service Award

Owens' True Value and Balcony House Bed & Breakfast tied for this award, given to businesses who excel not only in customer service, but in sharing information with visitors about local points of interest and community events.

Owens' True Value, which opened in May, 1992, is a retail hardware store with a service department. In 1996, they doubled their floor space, and have enlarged their outdoor sales area. In May, 2012, the business will mark its 20th anniversary.

Balcony House opened in May, 1999, and for the past 12 years, former Coloradoans Jim and Linda Pirog state they never regretted their decision to move here. They said Imperial is truly a progressive community and different from other small towns. In their marketing efforts, they stress not just their business but the whole community.

## Best Foot Forward Award

Mid-Plains Community College (MPCC) earned the Best Foot Forward Award, given to a chamber business that has performed exceptionally during the past year by going above and beyond to improve their business or community.

MPCC has seen a steady growth of students registering

and working on degree programs, from 177 in the 2008-09 year to 212 the next for a 20% increase. Campus coordinator Brenda Ledall said numbers are likely to continue to grow this school year.

The Imperial Extended Campus offers the Campus Connections program that give high school students the opportunity to take dual credit classes and start college coursework early. It also strives to provide local business training and a variety of community education classes.

## Best Store Front/Most Improved Business Award

Moreland Insurance received the Best Store Front/Most Improved Business Award for their recent remodeling project.

Owner Eric Moreland said they added all new wiring, dry-wall, trim, windows, heating/air conditioning and stucco, while adding new offices and conference rooms. The business also houses offices for Trustpoint Insurance, Pierce Law Office and Heaven is for Real Ministries.

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

## Award of Appreciation

Allo Communications earned a special award of appreciation for its contributions to Imperial. The committee felt this award was warranted to Allo, a non-chamber member, for their economic contributions to the city.

Allo employs 40 people, 19 of them in Imperial.

Formed in 2002 by Brad Moline and Russ Pankonin, Allo's primary business was local and long distance phone service in communities served by Qwest in the 308 area code. It now offers this service in 22 western Nebraska communities.

In 2005, Jeff Kuenne joined Allo as a co-owner, and the company began deploying fiber in the Scottsbluff/Gering area. The firm now offers local, long distance, internet and television services in Scottsbluff, Gering, Alliance, Bridgeport, Ogallala and soon, North Platte.

