



RBGA salutes region's best at annual awards dinner

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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GODFREY – Thursday night was a reflection of the past year and a night to honor some of the region's best achievements and people behind them at the **RiverBend Growth Associational Annual Awards Dinner** at Lewis and Clark Community College.

RiverBender.com Account Manager Pat Schwarte again was recognized as Ambassador of the Year for the Growth Association for the second consecutive year.

Schwarte was given the award for helping increase the visibility of the RBGA in the community and also for helping bring in new members.



RBGA Board Chairman Karen Cooper acknowledged more than 3,000 volunteers hours by the Ambassador Committee in 2015, then introduced the Ambassador of the Year awardee, Schwarte.

“Each month, Ambassador Committee members earn points for attending or working our events, and making recruitment and retention calls,” Cooper said. “At the end of the year, the Ambassador with the most points for the year is awarded the Ambassador of the Year.

One of the reasons that Pat has accumulated so many points is that he earns them by recruiting new members for the Growth Association. Pat, in addition to being a great volunteer, we thank you for your efforts in building our membership base. We are lucky to have him as an Ambassador.”

Cooper introduced the Chairman’s Awards to the group.



The Gateway Chapter National Multiple Sclerosis Society and Lewis and Clark Community College were recognized with a Chairman's Award for raising more than \$1.9 million with its "Bike MS," an incredible success. It was stated the "Bike MS" had an economic impact of \$200,000 to the region.

Lewis and Clark Community College President Dr. Dale Chapman and his staff were commended for being extremely accommodating to the riders and volunteers. Proper sleep stations for the volunteers, as well as camping spaces for riders, bike storage, showers and more than 100 tents were erected on the northeast side of the campus for the Sponsor Village. Cyclists came from all over the country, representing more than 25 states. Cyclists came from as far away as Idaho, Texas, Delaware and Florida. The Gateway Area Bike MS had 2,142 registered fundraisers on bicycles and more than 750 volunteers.



CNB Bank and Trust's Steve Thompson was given a **Chairman's Award** for his foundation of the Reach Out and Read Program. In the program, volunteers assist children in Alton grade schools with reading.

"Students arrive at school as early as 7:15 a.m., but class doesn't start until 8:00 a.m.," Cooper said in announcing Thompson's award. "This leaves the students with time to eat breakfast and leisurely read books in the gym. To maximize this early morning opportunity, community members volunteer 30 minutes each week to come in before school and listen to individual students read.

"The students have books in their backpacks that they take home to practice, and now the time before school is being used for additional practice. The idea is simple, but the impact on students is great. The group of community partners is expanding daily, thanks in large part to the outreach efforts of Thompson," Cooper said.

RBGA President Monica Bristow was given recognition for being awarded the Lester W. Braun Chamber Executive of the Year award, one of the most prestigious honors presented annually by the Illinois Association of Chamber of Commerce.

Cooper said this while recognizing Bristow for her outstanding efforts with the RBGA: "Her peers recognized what we already know...that Monica is passionate about her role

in RBGA and as a champion of our member communities. She is the face of our organization and is recognized throughout our communities.

“There seems to be no limit to the hours and energy Monica spends advancing the communities of the Riverbend. Monica’s contributions to the chamber and economic development activities in the Riverbend are literally too numerous to mention here. She brings a unique winning combination of servant leadership and friendship to our organization and the members we serve.”

The 12 Small Businesses of the Month were also recognized at the annual dinner.



Pat Ackman captured a Chairman’s Award from the RBGA and the Spirit of Tourism Award from the Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau for her work as a leader of the Miles Davis Memorial Statue Project. Karen Wilson was also cited for her contributions to the Miles Davis Statue project by the RBGA.

Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau President Brett Stawar presented the Spirit of Tourism Award and Bristow the RBGA Chairman’s Award to Ackman and Wilson.

“Thanks to a new piece of art in Downtown Alton created by such a talented artist as Preston Jackson, we have a new vibe flowing throughout the region,” Stawar said. “And, with the Visitor Center right across a parking lot, we see all types of people standing in awe of the art, interpretation and plaza. There is not a day that goes by that many people do not step up to Miles and take a selfie to celebrate him, this place and the project created by Pat and Karen.



“Monica and I can both attest to the passion centered around this project by all committee members, but can also say with clear affirmation that this project would not have made come to be without the vision, leadership and passion of Pat Ackman and Karen Wilson.”

New Growth Association Board Chairman Karen Wilson was also recognized, along with Karen Cooper, the outgoing board chair.

New RBGA board members announced were: John Roberts of Roberts Motors, Jim Shrader of The Telegraph, Martha Warford of the Beverly Farm Foundation, and Dwight Werts from Werts Welding and Tank Service, and Greg Caffey of the City of Alton, and Brandon Ferguson of Baxter Distributing.



Pat Schwarte Accepts River Bend Growth Association Ambassador of the Year Honors

Steve Thompson Accepts Chairman Award for Community Outreach Effort