



State of the RiverBend: Growth Association gives awards at annual luncheon

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GODFREY - Six local businesses were awarded "**Captains of the RiverBend**" awards at the 2016 **State of the RiverBend** luncheon.

The event is hosted by the **RiverBend Growth Association (RBGA)**, and was held this year in the commons area of **Lewis and Clark Community College (LCCC)**. The Captains of the RiverBend awards honor businesses and organizations located in the River Bend area for different categories, based on their contributions. Awards were given based on economic enhancement, government and public enhancement and community involvement.

Economic enhancement awards were given to **DanMar Enterprises, Inc.** and **Grafton Winery The Vineyards**.



DanMar Enterprises, Inc. is a real estate investment company based in **Alton**, which owns several historic properties in the city. Those properties include the **Haagen Haus** and the former pawn shop building on Broadway, now called **The Shops at Broadway and Henry**. Those shops now hold **The Painted Heron**, a new consignment shop in Broadway.

Upon accepting the award, **DanMar Enterprises, Inc. President Jeannine Kelly**, encouraged those who had the means to invest in the **Broadway Corridor**. Kelly formed DanMar Enterprises, Inc. in 1998 with her husband **Mark DeVer**. Kelly is an attorney who served as one of the founding members of **Alton Steel**, before leaving that

venture in 2014. She is an active member of several community groups, including the **Alton Godfrey Rotary Club, RBGA, Alton Foundation, Madison County Bar Association, Alton-Wood River Bar Association, Illinois State Bar Association and Missouri Bar Association.**

Upon accepting the award, Kelly said she discussed how to build the Broadway Corridor with a group of other community leaders five years ago. She said they came to the conclusion making a better Broadway was ultimately a responsibility of those who had the means to do so within Alton.

"We can't wait for anyone else to do it," she said. "We waited to renovate the Wedge, and we bought other buildings to have control of what was going on and restore that area."

Kelly said she was a "piece of the puzzle" helping Broadway to grow. She thanked other developers and members of the community for all they had done to bring more unique shops to the area. Kelly said more such places would make Alton a "destination" for retail. She ended her acceptance speech by encouraging all in the room to consider investing in Broadway.



Grafton Winery The Vineyards was founded by **Mike and Lori Nikonovich** as a boutique winery in 2006. It has since expanded to include a vineyard four miles from the winery, next to **Eckert's Grafton Farm**. The bottling line in the facility has increased production to 80 bottles an hour. The winery now has wine for sale across the State of Illinois through six distributors. It is also being sold in Missouri.

"Just keep drinking our wine, and thank you," Mike Nikonovich said upon his acceptance of the award.

The government and public enhancement award was given to LCCC in honor of their contribution to the **Scott Bibb Center**. The Scott Bibb Center was named for a defender of integrated public schools and an African-American father of two school-age children in Alton. He fought seven circuit court trials, resulting in five appeals to the Illinois Supreme Court from 1897-1908. The court ruled in Bibb's favor, but the school district was still segregated for an additional 50 years.

The Scott Bibb Center is located at the former **St. Patrick's School** building at the corner of Fifth and Central in Alton. LCCC is in the final phase of renovations. Upon completion, the center will offer services such as GED preparation and completion, family literacy, community technology, **Project Read** and tutoring. All of these programs are aimed at helping adults who may have not finished high school. The college has spent \$5.6 million improving the center.

"We're slugging it out," **LCCC President Dale Chapman** said. "It's wonderful of the group to do this."

Chapman also praised his institution for graduating as many as 1,000 students every year and contributing to as much as five percent of the area's GDP.

Three community involvement Captains of the RiverBend awards were given.



The first was given to **Midwest Members Credit Union**, formerly known as **Shell Community Federal Credit Union**. According to the RBGA, the credit union "continues to grow and reach out to new communities and be an inclusive financial cooperative that remains committed to serving the people within area communities."

Greg Lyons, who accepted the award on the credit union's behalf, said he, like many others in the room, came of age in the Alton area. He said he was proud to be a part of a business giving so much back to the community, and took pride in having so many employees active in so many organizations. He said Midwest Members Credit Union, which claims a membership of as much as 17,000, had a philosophy of community involvement, which did not change with its name.

"Everybody in this room deserves credit, just as much as the honorees deserve credit," Lyons said.



The second was given to **Robert "Chick" Fritz, Inc**, which is the largest beer distributor in Southern Illinois. It has operated for 70 years, after being founded in **Mascoutah, Illinois**. **Anne, Bob and Bobby Fritz** took the stage to accept the honor. The business, which started with a warehouse and an ice house, is now in its third generation and continues to follow the philosophies of its founder, "**Grandpa Chick**."

Robert "Chick" Fritz, Inc. was praised by the RBGA for their appearance at so many community events as well as their involvement with the **Liberty Bank Riverfront Amphitheater**. The distributor serves its product at nearly every event held at the amphitheater, are very active with its committee and even helps clean the area after events have finished.

"We have felt like family ever since coming up here in 1997," Anne Fritz said.

That feeling of family has contributed to the distributor's sponsorship of several Oktoberfests, church picnics and gold tournaments held in the honor of several good causes.



The final award for community involvement was given to **TheBANK of Edwardsville**. The bank has won the award previously in 2008. They were chosen to receive the Captain of the RiverBend honor due specifically to their work with education, atop several other community interactions.

Rob Schwartz accepted the award on behalf of the bank. Due to the bank's mantra, "the path to success is paved by education," as many as 5,000 area students have benefited from scholarships or educational programs at least partially funded by TheBANK of Edwardsville. The bank also contributed cash contributions for 60 other area nonprofits and contributed in some way to the work of as many as 30 more. Schwartz also said as many as 30 of the employees of the bank have donated hours of their time to nonprofit work within the community as well.

"Our employees are encouraged to volunteer, especially at places they feel passionate about," he said.

The luncheon concluded with the "State of the RiverBend" address given by **RBGA President, Monica Bristow**. She beamed due to nearly \$1 billion being invested across the River Bend area by both private and public entities. Those products range from a

\$4.5 million expansion project at **Senior Services Plus** to a new pipeline and two storage tanks to allow oil to be moved from the **Keystone Pipeline** to a planned docking facility in **Hartford** for **Omega Partners**.