

Publication: Charlotte Sun;Date: Oct 5, 2008;Section: Our Town;Page: 28



PUNTA GORDA CHAMBER BANQUET

The Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce rolled out the red carpet and more than 260 members made their way into the elegantly decorated Isles Yacht Club. If this kind of business Awards Banquet sounds like a bore, listen again. From the minute you entered, received John Wright's warm welcome, you knew it would be a fun night.

Yes, awards after awards can drag, but mixed with humor, they are as they are intended; acknowledgement for good work and appreciation from your fellow members.

Charlie Shoe, who is the "Mr. Smooth" of Master of Ceremonies, chores set the pace for the evening. One of the first honors on the agenda went to Chamber President Wright by City Councilman Charles Wallace. An upbeat proclamation in which many of the "whereas" sentences were eliminated ... thank you, Charles.

This was no rubber chicken dinner. Chef Mark pulled forth his finest culinary talents and this was a "hot meat, chilled salad, and divine dessert" meal. While dining you could hear the melodic music of MC Squared from the dance floor.

There was a small performance by the Royal Palm Grannies ... a "Walker Drill Team." These "grannies" could really throw their weight around, which somehow indicated there was more youth behind the gray wigs than we should know about. Nonetheless, amusing and fun.

On to the awards ... 17 local businesses had been nominated ... from such great organizations, how do you select just one ... You don't ... You make more awards, and so they did.

Member's Choice Award went to Swiss Chocolate owned by Maria and Franz Von Atzigen. This was given for special recognition for their involvement in the community.

Young Entrepreneur Award – Bin 82 Tasting Room – Nick and Casey Nemeec. Such a new and innovative business that has definitely left its mark in downtown Punta Gorda.

Pinnacle Achievement Award - Fishermen's Village. It deserves every honor for creating importance and value to our community. Patti Allen accepted for "Fish Village."

Business of the Year – Nonprofit went to Habitat for Humanity. Under the energetic leadership of Mike Mansfield, Habitat has built a record number of new homes for the needy. Their success was applauded.

Business of the Year – Small Category went to the new fitness craze, The Yoga Sanctuary. Bonnie Yonkers and her passion for yoga has brought a new spirit to the business sector of Punta Gorda.

Business of the Year – Large Category went easily to Strang, Olsen and Lynch CPAs. Ron Olsen and Brenda Lynch have given time and energy pro bono for many local nonprofits in the region.

And you thought the party was over... no way. There was still the presentation of Kathy Silverberg, the incoming Chair of the PGCC. Her committee will consist of: Chair Elect – Ron Olsen, Vice Chair- Brad Nurkin, Treasurer – Jan Sidebottom, Secretary- Dorothy Strunk and Past Chair-Rick Wright. ... OK, now the party is over.



Volunteer appreciation given to Stephanie Stewart by John Wright.



2008-2009 Board Chair – Kathy Silverberg.



Charles Wallace presents John Wright with city's proclamation.



"Grannies" solo act.



Franz and Maria Von Atzigen – Swiss Chocolate.



Rick and Debbie Wright.



Bonnie Yonker – Yoga Sanctuary.



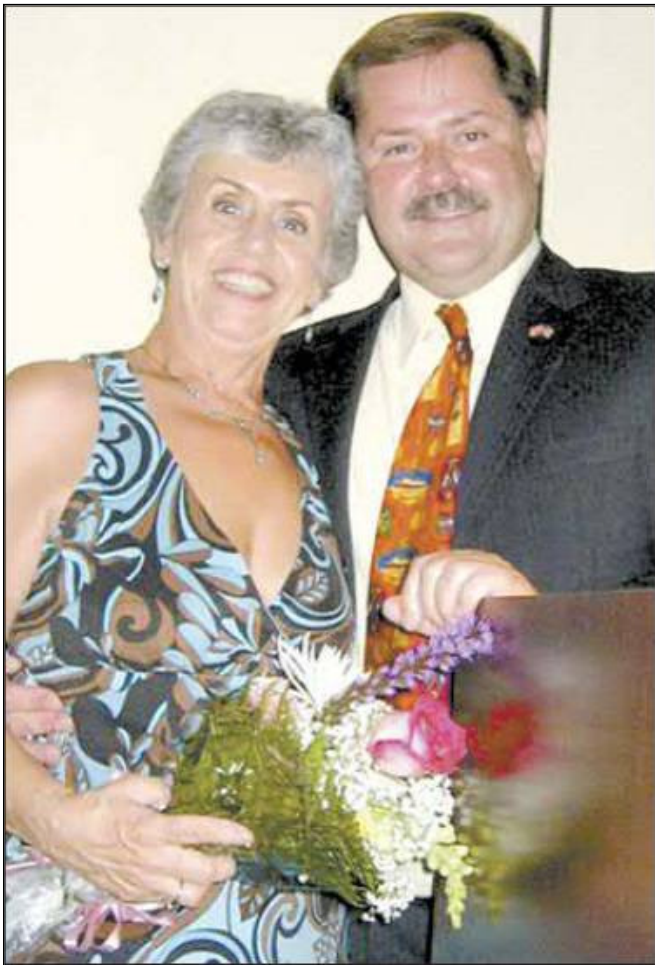
Casey and Nick Nemec – Bin 82.



Patti Allen – Fishermen's Village.



Mike Mansfield – Habitat for Humanity.



Another volunteer appreciation to Beverly Zockine from John Wright.



Brenda Lynch and Ron Olsen – Strang, Olsen and Lynch CPAs.



Jim Lawson, Beverly and Charlie Shoe.



Royal Palm "Grannies" perform.