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Community is big for business leader

Loft's diversity also earns laurels

By Craig Wolf
Poughkeepsie Journal

It seems to pay off in praise if you do something nice for the City of Poughkeepsie.

Richard Chazen proved the point Tuesday when he got a standing ovation from the luncheon crowd gathered in his honor. The occasion was his receiving of the Businessperson of the Year Award from the Poughkeepsie Journal.

Chazen and his family have been in the community for a long time and been successful in business. That's the Chazen Cos., a group involved in planning, surveying, engineering and environmental study that now has 140 employees and four offices.

The frosting on the cake came when Chazen moved his office from the Town of Poughkeepsie into expanded space that his company bought on Fox Street and completely renovated. Getting new life into the long-empty building that once housed IBM Corp. offices was high on the city's wish list.

Chazen's community involvement is the other part of what won him the award.

City nonprofit honored

Tuesday's luncheon also served to honor Mill Street Loft, a nonprofit also based in the city, with the Journal's Diversity in the Workplace Award that calls attention to good efforts and achievement among local employers in building well-balanced work forces free of bias based on race, age, gender and other discriminatory distinctions.

About 150 guests attended the luncheon at Dutchess Community College, which was cosponsored by the college's foundation, the Poughkeepsie law firm of Corbally, Gartland and Rappleyea and



Darryl Bautista/Poughkeepsie Journal

Carole J. Wolf, executive director of the Mill Street Loft which won the Poughkeepsie Journal's Diversity in the Workplace Award, and Richard Chazen, president of the Chazen Companies and the Journal's 2003 Businessperson of the Year, at the luncheon honoring the two Tuesday at Dutchess Community College.

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the Journal.

"I'm lucky to have had so many opportunities to get involved in this community," Chazen said.

That may be an outgrowth of asking too many questions. Chazen told how he queried some friends who were on the board of Vassar Brothers Hospital and soon wound up being asked to join it. It's now Vassar Brothers Medical Center, and he became chairman of its board.

"My years on the board of Vassar Brothers have been one of the most fulfilling experiences that I have had," Chazen said.

Chazen said a common thread ran through the previous winners of the award: "They were all very involved in this community."

Got started early

Chazen said he followed the example of his parents, Milton and Fay Chazen.

"You have to give something back to the community," he said.

He also has served on the board of Poughkeepsie Day School, which he attended as a youngster and where his children have gone. Chazen also was named last year to the board of the Dutchess County Economic Development Corp.

Chazen isn't ready to retire, but he said his son Colin asked him that recently. "When I do retire from business, I assure you I will not retire from community service," he said.

Journal Executive Editor Margaretta Downey said city officials saw Chazen's building project providing "a green light to encourage other business leaders to embrace the city."

Frederick Watson knows of Chazen's work for Mid-Hudson Pattern for Progress' project to revive "brownfield" polluted industrial sites. "Chazen did a great deal of work ... and kind of subsidized it a little bit."

"He's a good guy; he's done a lot for the community," said Richard Henley, executive vice president of Health Quest, parent of Vassar. "He's probably one of the most regarded engineers."

Accepting for Mill Street Loft, Executive Director Carole Wolf called the diversity honor "a very special award" that made the group proud. "For 23 years, Mill Street Loft has been using the arts to change lives," she said. "We have always reached out to underserved audiences."

Joe Davis, supervisor of the Town of Poughkeepsie, said the event served a valuable purpose. "At times, we don't take the time to say thank you for a job well done," whether it's successes in business, education or nonprofits. "We appreciate what you've done. It comes from the heart."

AT A GLANCE

BUSINESSPERSON OF YEAR

For 12 years, the Poughkeepsie Journal has selected its Business Person of the Year by drawing nominations from the business community.

Selection committee

Participating on this year's nomination and selection committee were:

Len Cane, president, The Chamber of Commerce of Ulster County.

Ronald Coan, president and CEO, Dutchess County Economic Development Corp.

D. David Conklin, president, Dutchess Community College.

Ann Davis, director, Marist College's Bureau of Economic Research.

Michael DiTullo, president, Mid-Hudson Pattern for Progress.

Robert Hannan, retired senior vice president, Bank of New York.*

Larry Johnson, board chairman, Greater Southern Dutchess Chamber of Commerce.

Tom LeGrand, Rhinebeck small-business owner.*

Charles S. North, president, Poughkeepsie Area Chamber of Commerce.

Edward McCormick, executive director, Family Partnership Center.

Roger Smith, president, Pawling Corp.*

Joseph Tockarshewsky, president, Jotemar Properties.*

Sherre Wesley, executive director, Dutchess County Arts Council.

Sandy Williams, president, Williams Lumber & Home Centers.*

Margaretta A. Downey, Journal executive editor.

Richard L. Kleban, Journal managing editor.

* Past winners

Past winners

2002: Sandy Williams, president, Williams Lumber & Home Centers.

2001: Roger Smith, president, Pawling Corp.

2000: Charles Conklin, president & CEO, Conklin Corp.; now retired.

1999: Abel Garraghan, president, Heritagenergy Inc.

1998: Stanley Grubel, general manager, Philips Semiconductors, East Fishkill plant; now retired.

1997: Joseph Tockarshewsky, CEO, Bank of the Hudson; now president, Jotemar Properties.

1996: Linda S. Sanford, general manager, IBM's S/390 division; now senior vice president, Enterprise On Demand Transformation.

1995: Tom LeGrand, Rhinebeck businessman and former chairman, Dutchess County Economic Development Corp.

1994: Peter Van Kleeck, president & CEO, Premier National Bank

Corp.; now retired.

1993: Robert Hannan, senior vice president, The Bank of New York; now retired.

1992: John E. Mack III, chairman, Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp.; now retired.

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