



Most Outstanding Citizen of the Year

By [JOANN LIVINGSTON](#) Daily Light Managing Editor

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Hilda Chapman was honored as the 2006 Citizen of the Year during the Waxahachie Chamber of Commerce's annual awards banquet Thursday night.

A Waxahachie native, Chapman was recognized for her service with the Downtown Merchants Association and Bethlehem Revisited.

"(Chapman) comes naturally by doing a great amount of work - like her parents did," said presenter Len Sullivan, 2005 recipient. "She has been involved in practically every project of the chamber and she is still very involved."

"I do appreciate this award so very much," Chapman said. "I do appreciate receiving it. I am so very honored."

Also recognized for their service were the chamber's executive committee, board of directors, advisory board and committee members.

Outgoing board members recognized for their service included Wayne Boze, Mary Kirton, Don Schmerse and Cindy Smith.

Guest speaker of the evening was Andy Horner, who presented an inspirational program that included a message about the opportunities represented by living in the United States.

"It is important that we believe in America," Horner said, saying that despite the negativity of the times, "There are a lot of good things in America, and we still live in the best nation."

Horner encouraged those in attendance to remember the No. 1 asset in their businesses: people. "The key to your business' success is in your ability to relate to people," he said.

The chamber's annual major awards also were presented during the banquet, with Shirley McLeroy honored as Ambassador of the Year.

The award "is given to an individual who with countless volunteer hours, commitment and willingness has made a positive impact on the Waxahachie Chamber of Commerce," Jeff Lincks said. "Through their actions and goodwill this person truly embodies the ambassador spirit."

The Mabel Frame Award for contributions in the area of promoting tourism was presented to Holly Davis by Chapman.

Davis' service has included serving as chairman of the Gingerbread Trail several times, past president

of Historic Waxahachie Inc., conducting courthouse tours for schoolchildren and other groups, serving on the Chautauqua board and planning committee for the Chautauqua Assembly, serving as a board member of Waxahachie Partnership Inc. and the Ellis County Museum, and serving with the Waxahachie Symphony Association.

“She is always willing to help with any event or activity,” Chapman said.

Paul Stevens presented the Leadership Waxahachie Award to Joe Gallo, who was recognized for being active in the community, including serving on the City Council. Gallo will serve on the chamber’s executive board as third vice chairman in 2007.

“Since his arrival in Waxahachie, he has become an active member in the community,” Stevens said. “He has served on the city’s Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone board and the Navarro College advisory committee. Our recipient is a graduate of Leadership Waxahachie and a member of the Rotary Club. He also currently serves on the Waxahachie Chamber of Commerce executive board and the Historic Waxahachie Inc. board.”

The Marvin E. Singleton Jr. Environmental Beautification Award was presented to Victron Energy by Mark Singleton.

Owner Ali Sharaf and Victron Energy are not only a leader in wholesale fuel distribution, but also “a leader in branding and building beautiful facilities” across Ellis County, it was noted, with Victron’s new building across the street from the chamber recognized.

“It’s about beautification and putting a face on Waxahachie,” Singleton said.

The Small Business of the Year Award was presented to Philip Browne and Chick-fil-A.

“The owners became actively involved in the community before they ever opened the doors in July 2004 and that community involvement has only grown since the ‘first bite’ ceremony,” incoming chairman Teresa McNiel said. “They support many organizations in the community, such as the Waxahachie ISD, Meals-on-Wheels and the Waxahachie Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau. ... Anyone who has ever eaten at the restaurant will recognize their trademark hospitality phrases: ‘May I help you?’ and ‘My pleasure.’ You know the employees sincerely mean what they say.”

Business of the Year was presented to Kevin Chester of Linebarger, Goggan, Blair and Sampson.

Chamber president and CEO Debra Wakeland made the presentation, saying that the firm has “made a difference through support of a wide range of community organizations, such as Crime Stoppers, Meals-on-Wheels, Ellis County Youth Expo, the Gingerbread House, the Boys and Girls Club of Waxahachie and the Education Foundation for WISD.”

“We present this award to someone who has been - for the chamber - a team player in every sense of the word. Many chamber events - Ellis County Day in Austin, the Gingerbread Classic golf tournament, Waxahachie Night at the Texas Rangers and our annual auction - have been more successful thanks to the continual support of this person and this business,” said Wakeland, who also presented the Industry of the Year Award to SkillsNET.

“This is always a very difficult selection due to the many fine industries and businesses we have in our community,” she said. “However, upon evaluation, this company seemed to rise to the top.”

Citing a few of the headlines received by SkillsNET in 2006 due to its accomplishments, Wakeland said she had “personally witnessed this team create a fast and effective user-friendly solution to Waxahachie’s very own workforce management challenges.”

“Michael Brown is certainly much more than a consulting firm and not just another software company,” she said. “He is a friend to the chamber and city of Waxahachie and for this we acknowledge SkillsNET as Industry of the Year.”

Williams presented the Chair’s Special Award to Garry Brown.

“For nearly 15 years, this evening’s recipient has been more than an active chamber member - he has been a leader, a mentor and a counselor,” Williams said. “With an attention to detail and an appreciation for how today’s actions affect tomorrow’s opportunities, this unique volunteer gives untold time to our chamber, helping to ensure that this organization continues to be sound - and strong - for future members.

“At one point this past year, we had need for this person’s expertise, and despite the many reasons he could say no, he immediately agreed to take on additional responsibility for the board, providing knowledge and experience when it was most needed,” Williams said. “I hope this award can serve as a small token of my appreciation for his service to the chamber.”

“One of the great comforts I had this past year was the knowledge that I would be followed by someone with a passion for the community and a proven willingness to work hard on behalf of our city,” said Williams in his recognition of McNiel. “For the past few years, I have had the pleasure of working with Teresa McNiel through the chamber board and the Waxahachie Civil Service Commission, and know her to be someone who will build on our successes.

“I am pleased to be passing the gavel to Teresa, in who I have high hopes, great confidence and a vast amount of respect,” he said.

McNiel extended her appreciation to Williams for his service the past year before speaking about her theme for 2007: “Connecting the Dots.”

“Each dot is important to the other,” McNiel said, saying a dot can represent such as areas as business, industry, tourism and others. “Our dots are connected, and each dot is important to the other. We must keep these dots connected, stay involved and stay informed. In the coming year, I challenge you to become familiar with a different dot.”

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