

COMMUNITY

Umatilla citizens honored

Saturday banquet recognizes police, school, business and civic leaders

BY SEAN HART
HERMISTON HERALD

With many deserving nominees, the Umatilla Chamber of Commerce board had a difficult time narrowing the selection, so two people were honored as citizens of the year.

At the Umatilla Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center Distinguished Citizen Award Banquet Saturday, Master of Ceremonies and past Chamber President Roak TenEyck said both Judy Simmons and Jane Stamer deserved recognition for going "above and beyond" for the community, and both received the Citizen of the Year award.

TenEyck said Simmons "worked tirelessly" on city projects, at the Umatilla Museum and for Umatilla Landing Days. He said she serves on the city Code Improvement Board and was instrumental in developing the community newsletter.

"She cares about her beloved community, and her actions reflect it," he said.

Stamer, a retired Clara Brownell Middle School teacher who taught in Umatilla for 26 years, is a Kiwanis member, helps with a variety of community projects and served on the Umatilla Library Board for several years, TenEyck said.

"She has taught so many of our children and is a staunch supporter of our school district and strong advocate for our community," he said. "She is quick to help when needed and led a variety of student groups."

TenEyck said Eastern Oregon Telecom General Manager Joe Franell demonstrated "industrious commitment, extraordinary vision, creative skills and tireless effort" to enhance Umatilla's future, and he was honored with the George Alan Curtis Creative Spirit Award. TenEyck said he asked Franell to mediate negotiations to settle a zoning dispute between city of Umatilla and Port of Umatilla officials, and Franell graciously agreed and ultimately helped the parties reach an agreement and avoid a state appeal.



SEAN HART PHOTO

The Umatilla Chamber of Commerce, Umatilla Police Department and Umatilla School District recognized the efforts of community members at the Distinguished Citizen Award Banquet Saturday. Pictured are, back row, from left, chamber George Alan Curtis Creative Spirit Award winner Joe Franell, UPD Employee of the Year Steve Vandever, chamber Business of the Year G&J Dairy Freeze owner Graig Gunsolley; front row, from left, USD Bridge Builder Award winner Tina Ridings, UPD Volunteer of the Year Elaine Ramos and USD Bridge Builder Award winner Corinne Funderburk.

"The outcome of that meeting had the weight of the Umatilla region's future hanging in the balance," he said. "While the future is not yet written, at least now it has a chance to grow and become something great."

TenEyck said G&J Dairy Freeze was awarded Business of the Year after owner Graig Gunsolley partnered with the Umatilla Public Library to provide ice cream for children in the summer reading program and teen night.

"The person who nominated this business said, 'Our library programs have been a great success due to the wonderful generosity of this person and business,'" TenEyck said.

In addition to the chamber honors, the Umatilla School District and the Umatilla Police Department also presented awards.

McNary Heights Elementary School Vice Principal Rick Cotterell said the Garrett family has "become synonymous with youth sports" in Umatilla and honored them as the district's Volunteers of the Year.

He said the district also recognizes the efforts of those who help create connections between the school and community and awarded McNary Heights fourth-grade teacher Corinne Funderburk, who taught in the building for more than 20 years, with a Bridge Builder Award.

"She is a phenomenal teacher, and she is almost always involved in the things that are happening our school, in our community," he said. "She has been a very important part of our student support team and also (has) just been essential to our Battle of the Books program, which the kids really love."

District After-School Program Director Josh Ego awarded the second Bridge Builder Award to Tina Ridings, the coordinator of the McNary after-school site, where she works with more than 250 students each day.

"Tina is outstanding, and I think the greatest part of what Tina does stems from how much she genuinely cares for the community and for the kids in the community," he said.

Umatilla Police Chief Darla Huxel said all members of the department vote for the Employee of the Year, and while almost everyone received a vote, Officer Steve Vandever earned the most and this year's honor. After starting as a reserve officer in 2002, Huxel said she hired him to work full time in 2005, and, since then, Vandever has accrued more than 1,700 hours of training.

"Steve is also a firearms instructor, field training officer, deputy medical investigator and has received his advanced police officer certification," she said. "Steve is also the assistant

fire chief with the Umatilla fire district, which is a volunteer position. Because of his vast training from both fields, he was awarded a 'Lifesaving Award' in 2006 for his help in saving the life of one of our basketball coaches when she collapsed at a game."

Huxel honored Rich Estes as Reserve Officer of the Year and said he dedicates many more than the required 16 volunteer hours per month to the position, even though he is gone for extended periods of time because of his day job.

"I might as well change this to the 'Rich Estes Award,'" she said. "Since Rich started as a reserve officer in 2006, he has received this award five times. This past year was no exception, and he was unanimously chosen again as Reserve Of-



SEAN HART PHOTO

Past Umatilla Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors President Roak RenEyck, left, presents one of two Citizen of the Year awards to Judy Simmons Saturday at the Umatilla Distinguished Citizens Award Banquet.



SEAN HART PHOTO

Past Umatilla Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors President Roak RenEyck, left, presents one of two Citizen of the Year awards to Jane Stamer Saturday at the Umatilla Distinguished Citizens Award Banquet.

ficer of the Year." Elaine Ramos was named the department's Volunteer of the Year for tailoring all of the police uniforms with "precision and perfection," Huxel said.

"Every single shoulder patch is exactly the same on every shirt, and every hem on a uniform pant or shirt is done to the exact same length to make us look sharp and professional," she said. "Although Ms. Ramos does not live in our community, her efforts reflect on our community. Volunteering

is nothing new to Ms. Ramos. She spent several years volunteering with the Echo School District and is constantly helping her children with their volunteer efforts." Huxel said the Bordon family, who own Java Junkies, earned the Spirit of Community Award for devotion to the community.

"They have been involved with so many events that I could not begin to name them all," she said. "They have given time and money to promote our community in a positive light."

State police arrest two following reports of gunshots

EO MEDIA GROUP

Reports of gunfire Friday night outside Hermiston led Oregon State Police to arrest two men, including one connected to a 2011 case of manslaughter.

Umatilla County jail and circuit court records show Oregon State Police out of Hermiston arrested Kevin Ricardo Melendez, 20, of Hermiston, and Geovanni Sanchez, 21, of Umatilla, for interfering with a peace officer. They each pleaded not guilty to the charge Monday in circuit court and are in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, in lieu of \$5,000 bail. Sanchez has his next hearing March 23 and Melendez on March 30.

Other agencies reported assisting state police after a woman at 10:05 p.m. Friday told 9-1-1 someone shot at her boyfriend at Sagebrush Road and Baggett Lane, Hermiston. There were no additional reports of anyone getting shot.

Melendez faced the charge of manslaughter in connection to the beating death of Mario Calvillo Ramirez, 27, of Irrigon. Ramirez died of blunt force trauma to the head the night of Oct. 18, 2011, outside the Crossroads Truck Stop,

2020 Highway 730, Umatilla. The state dismissed the charge and sent the case to juvenile court.

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Wed. Aug. 12 • 9pm
JOHN MICHAEL MONTGOMERY

LATINO NIGHT: THURSDAY, AUG. 13



Fri. Aug. 14 • 9pm
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Sat. Aug. 15 • 9pm
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RESERVED TICKETS GO ON SALE AT 8AM, MONDAY MARCH 16TH
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