

News

Chamber recognizes best in the business

KRISTI PATTON
Western News Staff

They were noted for solving a 38-year-old mystery, boosting the community spirit and for exemplary business service to the city.

The Business Excellence Awards hosted by the Penticton and Wine Country Chamber of Commerce at the Penticton Lakeside Resort recognized the hard work of people and businesses in the community.

Cherry Lane shopping centre was awarded Business of the Year for their partnerships with non-profit groups, local charities and organizations. As well, they were recognized for their innovative marketing.

"It was phenomenal being recognized," said Kim Lawton, marketing director at Cherry Lane. "This was such a great year to win this because the staff, managers and tenants wanted to step up in 2010 and really be a part of the community. With the community centre being closed we really wanted to step up and offer the community a place they can go where it was fun, has a good energy and a happy atmosphere."

Cherry Lane was packed with events last year from hosting a Halloween Spooktacular, an Easter event, Literacy Day, several fundraising walks and allowing a number of non-profit groups to use the space to bring awareness of their cause to the community free of charge.

"We also wanted to keep people shopping locally, so by having so many events here we had something for everyone who comes to Cherry Lane," said Lawton.



Kristi Patton/Western News

KIM LAWTON, marketing director at Cherry Lane shopping centre, proudly shows the Business of the Year award given to Cherry Lane at Saturday's Business Excellence Awards hosted by the Penticton and Wine Country Chamber of Commerce.

The Community Booster Award went to Peter Bros. Construction Ltd, who helped fill the stands in the South Okanagan Events Centre during the Penticton Vees Charity Challenge. Peter Bros. purchased 837 tickets to push the attendance numbers to 4,000. In turn, local charities cashed in on \$34,000. Over a dozen charities benefited and those in attendance at the game donated six truck loads of food for the

Salvation Army Food Bank. Peter Bros. is also the key sponsor for the Peach Festival Parade and have implemented strategies that work toward improving air quality and reclaiming the natural resources used in their day-to-day operations.

Andy Oakes, president of Okanagan Hockey School, was awarded the Business Leader of the Year award. Okanagan Hockey School

announced in September they have a \$13.6 million economic impact on the South Okanagan yearly. This year the school expanded with the addition of a female midget program to the hockey academy and hosting female camps. Oakes is currently developing a winter program for Australia and New Zealand to capitalize on their summer season and build much-needed winter tourism for Penticton.

In the Unsung Hero category, Steve Toth and Kevin Aschhoff were awarded for their part in recovering a vehicle from the bottom of Skaha Lake. The pair discovered human remains in the vehicle that RCMP identified as belonging to a young woman who disappeared 38 years ago.

The Downtown Penticton Association was awarded with the Hospitality/Tourism Business Award for their tireless efforts on making downtown a place for residents and visitors to come together as one. DPA executive director Barb Haynes was recognized as being instrumental by going above and beyond to organize events such as the Santa Claus Parade, Downtown Community Market and the Downtown Ambassador Program which acts like a moving information centre in the summer.

Other award winners include Hoodoo Adventure Company for the Home Based Business Award, Structurlam Products Ltd. for Industrial Business Award, Peach City Runners and Adventure Sports for Retail/Service Business Award, Bodies on Power for New Business Award, Samantha Wright for Young Citizen of the Year and Cam Lawton of Bayleys Brew ha ha for Young Entrepreneur.

Minister's address fails to impress fruit growers

STEVE KIDD
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Headed into their annual meeting, B.C. fruit growers put replanting, new insect pests, crop and production insurance high on the list of areas where government support is needed as they deal with back to back years of below-cost return on their crops.

Members of the BCFGFA hoped they would hear some good news about these and other topics at the Friday address from B.C. Minister of Agriculture Ben Stewart.

But Stewart's big announcement didn't dedicate any new provincial money to the fruit industry, or directly address the growers' concerns. Instead, the \$5 million Tree Fruit Market and Infrastructure Innovation Initiative is a rededication of funds announced last July, made up of \$3 million from the federal AgriFlexibility Fund and \$2 million from the province.

"He didn't have anything new to say," said Alanna Claridge, an orchardist whose family has been in the industry since the 1930s. She notes that farmers are struggling — with apple prices predicted to be in the 16 cent range this year — and that it will continue until the province starts to turn in a more positive direction.

"You just hear the same old thing from them all the time," she said, noting that many apple growers are financially strapped — especially a lot of the newer growers in the valley. It will continue to be tough, she said, until the prices for apples and other fruits get better.



Steve Kidd/Western News

OSOYOOS FRUIT GROWER Ranbir Kambo listens closely, along with other delegates to the B.C. Fruit Growers annual convention, to an address by B.C. Agriculture Minister Ben Stewart. Later, Kambo questioned the minister on the lack of government support for the industry.

"They've put a lot of money out there and a lot are having a hard time," said Claridge. "Even if they are just leasing they have put money into new plants, fencing, irrigation — you're talking about a lot of money per acre."

Stewart stressed the need for innovation in the fruit industry, saying the industry needs to examine

whether it operates the best and most competitive type of operation.

"I'm not afraid to say it's time we took a really hard look at this industry, we need to dig deep and see what we could do better," he said. "Let's analyze and see where our current funding is being used, and let's ensure it is getting the industry the higher rates we know you all need."

"The government wants to work with you, but we need to be more effective and we also need to be competitive ... where we need to make improvements."

"It's disconcerting to hear him say that producers need to do more for themselves and rely less on the government," said BCFGFA president Joe Sardinha, who was re-elected to

his position at the AGM. He is concerned the province is saying do more with less when B.C.'s investment in agriculture lags behind the other provinces.

"We don't want to be farming the government," said Sardinha, adding that it is wrong to think of replant funding and other support programs as subsidizing the industry, but as incentive for farmers to innovate and keep up with current practices.

"We need the government to put their fair share into agriculture," he said, noting that the province has not lived up to commitments made when the Agricultural Land Reserve was introduced in the 1970s.

Statistics presented at the AGM shows that B.C. reinvests around five per cent of the province's agricultural GDP into the sector. That's the lowest of any province in Canada, comparing poorly to Quebec, which reinvested about 30 per cent in 2008-09 or even the next lowest, New Brunswick, sitting at about nine per cent for the same period.

"We should not be the lowest province in Canada. We have a lot of opportunity in this province for agriculture, but it will not continue without adequate support," said North Okanagan grower Penny Gambell, herself a former BCFGFA president.

Farmers are caretakers of the land, according to Sardinha, preserving valuable agricultural land for the future. Yet, he said, producers have been "subsidizing" consumers for years, with food prices that are lower than any other industrialized country.