

Published Friday, September 22, 2006
Friday, September 22, 2006

Haven Chamber Honors Members

By JOY COCHRAN

The Ledger

LAKE WALES -- Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce officials honored a few of their own during their annual meeting held at the Lake Ashton Golf Club.

In the large business category, 100 employees or more, Bostick Heart Center at Winter Haven Hospital took the 2006 Industry Award.

"It took 18 years of anticipation and hard work to become a reality," said Howard King, Bond Clinic CEO, as he announced the winner Wednesday night. "It required successful completion of a long and often frustrating state approval process."

In the first 11 months of the center's operation, 2,430 procedures have been performed at the \$6.5 million heart center. The center employs a staff of 30.

The 2006 Industry Award for businesses with fewer than 100 employees went to PenGeo Inc., owned by George and Seretha Tinsley.

The company involves Tinsley Family Concessions and the Tinsley Group, and operates the KFC restaurant on Havendale Boulevard, as well as TGI Friday's at Tampa International Airport and a 23-restaurant partnership at Miami International Airport.

"They attribute their success to their employees, including several who have been with them since they opened their doors 20-plus years ago," King said. "The general manager of their Havendale store started with them as a cook 21 years ago."



From left, Bonnie Parker, new chamber president, chats with Rick McCurley, general manager of Cypress Gardens Adventure Park, and Kent Buescher, CEO of the attraction, at the annual meeting of the Greater Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday in Lake Wales. (JOY COCHRAN/The Ledger)

Both Tinsleys enjoy working with youth. Seretha Tinsley mentors young people, while George Tinsley works with students and encourages and nurtures young entrepreneurs.

And the newly installed chamber president, Bonnie Parker, said she has an ambitious plan for the coming year.

"We want to make sure you feel you are truly getting a good return on your chamber investment, so we have added some new things for you to look forward to during the coming year," Parker told the crowd of more than 300 attending the dinner.

"The city of Winter Haven has set its sights on becoming nothing less than a premier city," said Parker, who is a senior vice president and area manager for SunTrust. "You and I, through the efforts of the chamber, can be effective partners in seeing the premier status is realized."

Some of the initiatives on Parker's agenda include a survey focusing on meeting the needs of small-business members, initiating a "Business Over Breakfast" series and a quarterly women's luncheon forum, "Business on the Balcony" networking events, "Let's Talk About Growth," a community outreach forum with city officials, and a site visit with CSX Transportation at the Integrated Logistics Center in another community.

The chamber will also unveil new Web site and newsletter designs later this year.

Former chamber presidents also recognized Bob Gernert for his 10 years as executive director of the organization.

"We think it's time to let all of you know just how much of an impact Bob makes on our city," said Howard Beckert, 2003-04 president. "Bob is looked upon as a consensus builder, and because of his ability to work well with others, has forged strong, productive relationships to move Winter Haven forward."

Under Gernert's direction, the Winter Haven chamber has received the Chamber Magazine of the Year Award and in 2005 was the first, and only, Polk County chamber to be designated a four-star chamber by the United States Chamber, Beckert said.

Gernert received a Seiko wall clock from the chamber.

"You people make it fun to go to work every day," Gernert said in accepting the gift.

Joy Cochran can be reached at joy.cochran@theledger.com or 863-401-6970.
