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Area champions represent the best in the Petoskey community

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Kudos to the many winners at the recent Breakfast for Champions, representing the best in the Petoskey community.

The annual event highlights those in a number of business pursuits, and in the case of the Athena Award, someone who motivates and encourages women in the community.

This year's President's Award — given by the chamber to a person, business or organization which has had a significant impact on the community — was presented to Jim Kan of Andrew Kan Travel.

We could fill this column with Kan's contributions to the community. He has not only worked on any number of chamber programs, but other communitywide organizations as well.

As chamber president Lisa Ashley noted, "A lot of his volunteer efforts are focused around youth. He's been a coach with a number of our school sports teams and Little League teams. He has also given of his time to the award-winning Petoskey Marching Band Program. He also serves as president of the Petoskey Education Foundation and coordinates their biggest fundraising event of the year."

The Athena Award went to Denise Simon, a partner in Harbor Springs product design and engineering firm Innovate. Simon has served as a volunteer coach for Harbor Springs' Girls on the Run program, which offers experiential learning opportunities for girls ages 13-18. In this program, which combines physical activities with opportunities to enhance self-esteem, one of the nominators Martha Lancaster noted that Simon inspires and motivates young women to achieve full potential in their personal and professional lives.

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Lancaster added that Simon has supported women's advancement through her volunteer work for, and financial support of, groups such as the Women's Resource Center and Planned Parenthood.

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Three were honored with mission awards, that honor individuals, businesses and organizations which have assisted the chamber in its mission to help local businesses succeed.

One Mission Award went to First Community Bank, which has been a chamber member for 15 years.

"Beyond their long-term loyalty as a dues payer, this business has also given generously to the chamber as a sponsor and supporter of many programs and causes," presenter Liz Ahrens said.

She added that First Community employees have volunteered on chamber committees and that the bank's Petoskey president, Brian Braddock, regularly serves as a master of ceremonies for the chamber's Business Before Hours and Business After Hours networking programs.

The recipient of the second Mission Award was Diane Dakins. In her work at the Petoskey-Harbor Springs-Boyne Country Visitors' Bureau, Ahrens noted that Dakins has made extensive efforts to promote Petoskey.

"The tourism economy is paramount to the success of area businesses, and (Dakins) is often the link between a prospective visitor and our town," Ahrens said. "She greets every future guest with a warm smile in her voice and helps them plan their trip with an incredible knowledge of the area's amenities."

A third Mission Award was presented to George Korthauer, who has been Petoskey's city manager since 1983. Like Dakins, Ahrens said Korthauer approaches his job with passion, a commitment to service, a vision and a keen attention to detail.

Ahrens added that the city manager has played roles in downtown beautification efforts, the creation of a tax-increment financing program to develop Bayfront Park and numerous improvements to local infrastructure and amenities.

"Each project showcases his keen eye for detail, right down to the fact that the backs of our stop signs downtown are painted the 'Downtown Green' color," she said.

New at this year's breakfast was the Leadership Little Traverse

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Alumni Mentor Award. It is given to a local person who has provided mentoring services — in a formal or informal setting — and has had a sustained, positive impact on those being mentored.

The winner of the first LLT Alumni Mentor Award was Andy Hayes, a former executive director of the Petoskey chamber who's now president of the Boyne City-based Northern Lakes Economic Alliance.

The chamber's current executive director, Carlin Smith, noted that he and many others have benefited from Hayes' mentorship.

"There are many chamber directors with whom he advises, cheers and advocates, and I know his new staff at the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance has benefited from his energy and expertise," Smith wrote in his nomination letter. "I've had many mentors in my life, but Andy stands out as the one who has really helped me to grow personally and professionally, and allowed me to advance my career here in Petoskey."

The award was created in memory of Smith's late mother, Roberta, in recognition of the life lessons in leadership she provided for him. A committee made up of alumni from the Leadership Little Traverse program reviewed nominations from the community and picked the award recipient.

This year's Service Excellence Award was presented to Flowers from Sky's the Limit. The Service Excellence Award honors an individual, business or organization demonstrating superior, unique and unequalled service to the public.

"The customers of (Flowers from Sky's the Limit) have a deep loyalty and a fondness for this business and its owner," said Stafford Smith, chairman of award sponsor Stafford's Hospitality. "In fact, this is one of those businesses that has achieved that level of having 'raving fans.'"

The chamber's Ambassador of the Year Award went to Sharon Burnett of PMP Personnel Services. This traveling trophy is presented to a member of the chamber's Ambassador Committee who uniquely shows a fondness for the area and for the chamber through enthusiasm and service.

Chamber executive director Smith said Burnett has brought fun and energy to the ambassador group and the chamber as a whole.

"She is one member of the committee we can always count on to step up to volunteer when we're short-handed, or to take charge when the staff can't be in attendance," he said.

Several Architectural and Renovation Awards also were presented.

In the beautification category, awards went to the Alanson Improvement Group for its restoration work at the former Alanson City Hall, and to Temple B'Nai Israel in Petoskey for its recent building remodeling and expansion.

Awards for design/new construction went to Image North for its diagnostic health services office on Charlevoix Avenue, and to Northern Michigan Hardwoods for its new showroom along U.S. 31 South.

This year's heritage award was given to organizers of the ongoing restoration project at Petoskey's historic St. Francis Solanus Indian Mission Church.

Breakfast for Champions is a chance for the business community to step back and pay homage to the people and businesses in the community that make a difference, and make this such a great place to live.

We salute all the winners of this year's awards.

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