

DOWNTOWN CELEBRATES ITS SUCCESSES

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Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News (From left): Some of the Downtown Beloit Association (DBA) Awards Dinner winners included First National Bank and Trust Company (FNB) Executive Vice President Chief Lending and Retail Officer Don O'Day holding the Corporate Supporter Award on behalf of FNB President CEO Steve Eldred; Milt Kodl holding the Best Interior Renovation Project Under \$50,000 Award on behalf of Jewelry by Christopher; Mike Tabbert of the Ironworks Golf Lab holding Best New Small Business Award; Stateline Family YMCA CEO Doug Britt holding the Best Interior Renovation Project Over \$50,000 and Best New Large Business Awards; (front row, from left) Edward Jones' Kelly Eickstead holding the Best Storefront Display Award; DBA incoming Chair Stephanie Knueppel holding the Chairman's Award; and Kathy Hayden holding the Volunteer of the Year Award.

BELOIT - 'Survey says' downtown Beloit is thriving.

That's how speakers at Thursday's Downtown Beloit Association (DBA) Annual Awards Dinner described the bustling, scenic and opportunity-filled downtown. With a "Family Feud" theme, the lively awards event was held at La Casa Grande's Banquet Hall. The evening featured hors d'oeuvres, raffles and a live round of Family Feud as honorees were announced.

Incoming Board Chair Stephanie Knueppel, playing the game show's original host Richard Dawson, refereed and occasionally roasted two vying teams.

Downtown Beloit Association Promotions Committee Chair Malinda Obershaw and crew represented "Team Oberated" and Master of Ceremonies and Outgoing Board Chair Peter Fronk and friends were the "Fronk Family." As the two teams tried to come up with answers, the award winners were announced between rounds with much applause.

The Best Public-Private Partnerships in Revitalization Award went to Hendricks Commercial Properties and the City of Beloit. Other awards were as follows: Best Retail Event, Visit Beloit; Best New Business-large, Stateline Family YMCA; Best New Business-small, Ironworks Golf Lab; Best Façade Rehabilitation Under \$10,000, The Villager Gallery & Frame Shop; Best Façade Rehabilitation Over \$10,000, Beloit College CELEB; Best Interior Renovation Project Under \$50,000, Jewelry by Christopher; Best Interior Renovation Project Over \$50,000, Stateline Family YMCA; Best Storefront Display, Edward Jones' Kelly Eickstead; Volunteer of the Year, Kathy Hayden; Corporate Supporter, First National Bank President and CEO Steve Eldred; and Chairman's Award, Stephanie Knueppel.

Fronk said in 2017 there were 13 new businesses in the downtown, with 222 new jobs created. He said 2017 had many milestones such as First National Bank & Trust celebrating 135 years in the downtown, followed by Stanton Shoes with 110 years, and Austin's Barber Shop, with 100 years.

Obershaw highlighted some of the more than 50 days of events in 2017. She said more than 400 children attended the Halloween Costume Parade and Party, and the Grand Lighted Holiday Parade and Tree Lighting celebrated its 25th year. The fifth year of the Easter Eggstravaganza attracted more than 500 children. The Farmers Market averaged 9,200 visitors each Saturday, and the popular Fridays in the Park served more than 2,300 lunches. The Street Dance brought out 2,700 people.

"All of these events were possible with the help of 946 volunteer hours," Obershaw said.

With the DBA turning 30 in 2018, downtown design specialist Joe Lawniczak of the Wisconsin Main Street Program commended the DBA for its staying power, with an average of 6-8 years for DBA directors in addition to a strong staff and stable committees. He noted that Beloit is a Great American Main Street community - one of only 94 in the U.S., one of only 24 in Upper Midwest, and one of only five in Wisconsin. It was one of the first five communities to achieve Main Street status back in 1988.

Lawniczak also praised Beloit for having one of the top 10 farmers markets in the state of Wisconsin.

Downtown Beloit Association Design Committee member Marie Strombeck explained how the design committee reviews facade and signage grant applications. In 2017, \$5,000 in grants were approved and funded. In May, she said several new banners will be installed, chosen from the DBA art project judged during the 2017 Art Walk.

To keep the hanging baskets looking their best this year, Strombeck said the program will consist of fewer but larger baskets with a water reservoir to mitigate potential dry conditions. The DBA was provided with a new water wagon through a generous donation.