

Economic 'champions' celebrated at breakfast

- Judy Wagley Special to the Herald Times
- Jan 20, 2017



Photo by Judy Wagley Kurt Stocker of Road Warrior Truck Driving School, Brian Bejcek of Wolverine Power Plant, Mark Copeland of Jay's Sporting Goods, Josh Kent of SunFrog Shirts and Angielena and Nate Muellenberg of Snowbelt Brewery were recognized Wednesday by the Otsego County Economic Alliance for their contributions to community development in 2016.

GAYLORD — It was the breakfast of champions — those whose efforts keep Otsego County strong.

The inaugural Partner Celebration was hosted Wednesday by the Otsego County Economic Alliance. The event, sponsored by Huntington Bank, was held at the Otsego Grand Event Center.

“This is our way of highlighting the economic development scene throughout the county in 2016 including community projects, private investment, new businesses, business expansion, public projects and overall economic development,” said Lisa McComb, executive director of the economic alliance. “We have seen so much development in our area in 2016, including nine new businesses downtown.”

McComb presented impressive statistics and reported that in 2016 a total of \$216.2 million in private investments (including new businesses, commercial development and expansions and renovations) and \$3 million in public investments were made in Otsego County; 112 new jobs were created.

McComb said she foresees continued growth in the future.

“The economic development in the county in 2016 was phenomenal, and I already know we’ll see even larger private investment in 2017,” she said.

At the event, where more than 160 people gathered, five businesses were recognized for their outstanding contributions to community development in 2016, including: Wolverine Power Plant, largest capital investment; SunFrog Shirts, largest job creator; Snowbelt Brewing Company, downtown Gaylord economic driver; Jay’s Sporting Goods, Otsego County economic driver; and Road Warrior Truck Driving School, new small business success.

Guest speaker Gary Kosch, who owns Alpine Tavern & Eatery, the Otsego Grand Event Center and Main Street Market & Bistro, asked “Why Gaylord?” He answered by saying the Alpine brand puts a smile on people faces, and that Gaylord’s location is ideal for vacationers and businesses. He noted the advantage of the area’s economic diversity, and cited the strong and positive leadership the city and county enjoy.

“This area is gaining a lot of attention in Northern Michigan,” Kosch said. “It’s a great and vibrant community that can provide a lot of opportunities for our young people.”

Kosch concluded by coining what could become the city’s new slogan:

“Live Gaylord, grow Gaylord, go Gaylord!”

Al Zehnder CEO, Zehnder’s of Frankenmuth, also addressed the group on how to grow a business in a branded community.

He told anecdotes about his own community and business, and said that at Zehnder’s, each of the 925 employees has the same goal every day:

“Four words,” he said. “‘Every guest leaves satisfied.’ Whatever it takes.”

Zehnder acknowledged and praised the work and strength of the Gaylord community.

“You have something going on here,” he said. “You should be proud of your efforts.”