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Idaho Press-Tribune

Nampa Chamber fete spotlights community

http://www.Idahopress.com/news/?id=8374
May 14, 2008

By: Jon Meyer

NAMPA — The Nampa Chamber of Commerce honored a dedicated citizen, welcomed first lady Lori Otter to town and celebrated the local business community at its annual banquet Tuesday.

The 116th annual banquet brought hundreds together for the evening, recognizing business leaders and the chamber's membership while throwing in some fun and charity.

Mayor Tom Dale presented Citizen of the Year honors to longtime friend and community member Ray Mendenhall. Dale recognized Mendenhall's dedication to civic service and volunteerism.

Organizers took time for a ceremonial handing of the reins to the new chairman of the Chamber Board at Tuesday's banquet. Greg Braun of the accounting firm Ripley Doorn & Co. replaces Pam White in the top spot.

The event also featured Idaho's first lady lauding the accomplishments of the Idaho Meth Project in its effort to "unsell methamphetamine to our youth." Idaho drug policy leader Debbie Field also attended to support Lori Otter.

"So I always knew Nampa was a really cool place," Otter said, "but you people really know how to throw a party."

Proceeds of the silent auction went to support the Meth Project, which aims to reduce methamphetamine's victims in Idaho. Otter said when the project began last year, four out of five Idaho young people surveyed saw "little to no risk" in trying the drug once.

Caregiver, volunteer named citizen of year

NAMPA — At 81, Ray Mendenhall not only still cares everyday for his wife Sallie, stricken with Alzheimer's, but he also makes time for the community that he's been a part of for years.

Mendenhall received Citizen of the Year honors from Nampa Mayor Tom Dale at the annual Chamber of Commerce banquet Tuesday.

"This is an important occasion," Dale said, adding that it is difficult to select a citizen of the year. He looks for someone "who exemplifies the character that I believe people like to pick out and emulate," a person who "prefers to stay out of the limelight and doesn't want recognition."

He found that person in long-time friend and former Nampa bike shop owner Mendenhall. Now, Mendenhall remains active in counseling at the Canyon County Jail and with the Gideons organization, distributing Bibles to motels.

"Ray is an extraordinary man," Dale said. "Thank you for your spirit of giving and volunteering."

Between honoring citizens and chamber members with awards, there were barely moments to spare Tuesday for silent auctions and raffles before Lori Otter gave a speech concerning the Idaho Meth Project.

The energy remained high throughout the night with the prospect to win $300 in free gas or a free silent auction item at the themed event.

Idaho Meth Project

Otter described the beginnings of the Idaho Meth Project Tuesday, explaining how Gov. Butch Otter heard about the idea for the Montana Meth Project while in Congress. Since its implementation in that state, which spurred interest in the governor, Montana has gone from 5th in the nation in terms of meth use to 37th; Idaho is now 5th.

“And that’s not per capita people,” Otter said. “We have a problem.

“Our job is to unsell methamphetamine to the youth of Idaho. And we’re getting it done.”

Otter said the average child targeted by the advertising campaign sees the commercials depicting the horrors of the drug “between 5 and 9 times a week.” The ad spots were student-reviewed for effectiveness in combating the problem that Otter says is almost a “pandemic” in the Gem State.

“When it comes right down to it, there’s nothing we can do but keep going,” Otter said. She hopes Idaho holds a lower spot than Montana someday.

“People around this state aren’t interested in just waiting and sticking their head in the sand. They want to be part of the solution. And that’s the spirit of Idaho.”