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CARROLL, IOWA

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Jim Auen named Carroll's citizen of the year

Christensen, Prenger's, Career Options also honored by Chamber

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Jim Auen (left) receives the Community Service Award, commonly known as the citizen-of-the-year award, from last year's recipient, Nick Badding. (Photos by Butch Heman)

Longtime community booster Jim Auen was named Carroll's citizen of the year and former mayor and city councilman Robert Christensen was honored for his public service Monday during the Carroll Chamber of Commerce's annual banquet.

Also recognized were: Prenger's Slumberland, Heritage Business Award; Career Options, New Business Award; 2009 Chamber president Mike Franey; outgoing president Howie Drees; and nine new and outgoing members of the Chamber's board of directors.

No subterfuge was required to get Auen to the program at the Carrollton Centre without revealing he'd be the guest of the night - Auen, owner of Auen Distributing of Carroll, was to be master of ceremonies.

But it took some clever convincing to get Christensen there. The retired family physician said he was hornswoogled by his wife, Pat, who vowed the night would include a talk about four-laning U.S. 30, one of Christensen's many causes.



Dr. Robert Christensen (left) receives the Public Service Award from Jim Kanne.

The Community Service Award, commonly called the citizen-of-the-year award, honors continued outstanding service for the benefit of Carroll.

Auen, a Carroll native and Kuemper High and Iowa State grad, joined his family's wholesale beverage business 30 years ago after being a department manager for Target Stores.

"That decision turned out to be a windfall for Carroll," said presenter Nick Badding.

Auen lost both his parents while young and eight years ago lost his brother and business partner, Dave.

"Those hard-earned lessons in life helped form the compassionate and caring man we all know today," added Badding, last year's recipient.

Auen was chairman for a Kuemper schools system capital campaign and is president of the Kuemper foundation; has been president, board member, foundation board member and capital campaign leader for New Hope Village;

served on the leadership team for a fund drive at St. Anthony Regional Hospital; spent many years as president and board member for Carroll Area Child Care Center and Preschool; has been chairman and board member for Carroll Area United Way; is the longtime president of the Carroll County Cyclone Club; sits on the Iowa State University College of Business Founders Fund Society; is guest lecturer for the ISU College of Business; awards scholarships to Kuemper and Carroll seniors; and has been president and board member of the Iowa Wholesale Beer Distributors Association.

"You have to wonder how this guy has time to work," said Badding, noting that Auen's business has 22 employees and serves 265 clients in six counties.

"In true Carroll fashion he has been extremely generous with his resources. His financial support for our causes and campaigns goes without question, not only through his business but also personally. I think an even more notable attribute ... is his willingness to share his time and talent.

"... As I prepared my thoughts for tonight's award, it occurred to me this man has figured it out. He has the enviable ability to balance community service, family, fun and work."

Auen thanked his family, employees, parents and late brother.

"I am speechless," he said upon taking the podium.

"There are many people deserving of this. The key thing I try to stress ... is to give back. That's what this room is full of: people who give. Give your time, give your money, give your experience, give your knowledge. And that is why the town of Carroll moves forward.

"I'm happy to do what I do. Again, I just want to thank everybody for helping me."

Presenter Jim Kanne described Christensen as "a person of many faces, well-known, respected in his profession, active in civic matters, a leader in his church, and first and foremost a devoted husband and father."

After attending the University of Iowa and serving in the Air Force, Christensen opened his medical practice in Carroll. He was on the St. Anthony's staff 31 years, six as chief of staff.

In addition to serving a term as mayor and 12 years on the council, Christensen was a Boy Scouts den master, parish men's club president and member of the United Way board, Kuemper Century Club, University of Iowa Alumni Association, Elks Lodge, Knights of Columbus, Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, Farm Bureau, Carroll Area Development Corp., the Chamber and several professional organizations.

"His life was busy and at times hectic, but even so he was active in many facets of the community," said Kanne, adding, "I cannot believe all the things that he's done."

As mayor Christensen promoted passage of a local-option sales tax, the proceeds of which were used for downtown revitalization, construction of a new fire station and renovation of the police station. He also helped plan the aquatic center that's under construction, promoted the skate park and joined the call for a new public library.

"His accomplishments as a private citizen and public official are many," said Kanne. "I know we will all be thankful for his vision, his hard work and his dedication."

Christensen credited his father with introducing him to civic service at a young age. He spoke of selling charity ball tickets, working at a church food stand at a county fair and helping his hometown Rotary Club build a float for an Independence Day parade.

"I certainly appreciate this award. I am very humbled when I look to the list of previous recipients, and I'm honored to be included in their number," he said.

Christensen thanked his wife for encouraging him to be involved in the Carroll community and the people of Carroll "who have made it my privilege to live here and serve."

"I have certainly received more than I have ever given," he said. "I appreciate this honor very much."

Prenger's, in business over 50 years, has been one of Carroll's retail leaders and supports community services and charitable endeavors, said Heritage Business Award presenter Trish Roberts.

"Over the years this business has demonstrated vision, courage and leadership by expanding their business and diversifying their product line while focusing on their number-one goal, excellent customer service," she said.

"We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for all of you," said Dave Prenger, one of five family members to accept the award. "Carroll is a fantastic community. I can't think of a better place to live, a better place to work or a better place to raise a family."

Career Options "epitomizes the entrepreneurial spirit," having grown from a five-member start-up company to an employer of 140 in 16 months, said New Business Award presenter Franey. The company provides employees for Farmland Foods and other businesses in Carroll County.

"An importance of commitment to quality service and community involvement has always been a goal of this year's award winner," he said.

"It all happened because of the core group of people you see up here," said co-owner Randy Huegerich. "We have an excellent group of people that made some things happen. ... It's been quite a roller coaster for us but a great thing."

Also honored Monday were outgoing Chamber board members Craig Mertz, Don Neary, Francie O'Leary and Scott Tigges; and new board members Tom Duff, Mark Harmening, Jodie Janssen, Aaron Juergens and Jen Mosman.

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