

Vigre, McGee, Smith Johnston and Hoffman honored with awards during annual Economic Alliance banquet

By Susan DeLaire
Business to Business

The Economic Alliance of Lewis County hosted its annual awards banquet on Feb. 7 at Jester's Auto Museum & Event Center. Executive Director Todd Chaput began the evening with introductions, assisted by Alliance Board Chair Stuart Cavness. Richard DeBolt, the Alliance's former executive director, was also in attendance.

The Gail and Carolyn Shaw Industry Award was presented to Dry Box President and Founder Kirk Vigre. Chaput noted Vigre is always well-informed on what's happening in the local community.

Vigre serves on the .09 committee, the Industrial Commission and more. In late 2024, Dry Box announced it purchased the former Umpqua Bank building in downtown Chehalis as its headquarters.

Vigre's remarks in accepting the award were brief, and reflected his surprise at being the recipient of the award, noting he'd cast his vote for someone else.

When he announced the Community Commitment Award recipient, Chaput remarked the awardee seems to be involved in every many local events and meetings. Chaput noted he's worked closely with the recipient on the United



Photo courtesy of Economic Alliance of Lewis County

The Economic Alliance of Lewis County held its annual awards banquet at Jester's Auto Museum & Event Center in Chehalis on Feb. 7.

Learning Center as well. The Community Commitment Award was given to Larry McGee, a prominent member of the community for many years as a member of the Chehalis Community Renaissance

Team, Centralia Foundation, Twin Cities Rotary, the Centralia-Chehalis Chamber of Commerce, and among others.

In accepting the award, McGee said what he's learned from his experience

is success in business and leadership is about helping all the employees and people who make a business successful.

Presenting the Buck Hubbert Staff Award, Chaput said this person works as a mentor and team member, constantly reaching out to the Alliance and working with its employees both to learn and inform. Kelly Smith Johnston, owner of Clarity Consulting Partners and Centralia City Councilor, received the award.

When she accepted the honor, Smith Johnston turned the recognition back on the Alliance, remarking on the organization's growth and leadership in the local community.

The Chronicle/CT Publishing owner and CEO Coralee Taylor presented the Russ Mohny Recreation Resource Stewardship Award. The award, named for the newspaper's former outdoor writer, recognizes stewardship and service in that field. Onalaska High School educator and leader of the school's shop and award-winning aquaculture program, Kevin Hoffman, was the award's recipient this year.

Hoffman heads the school's aquaculture program, teaching students hands-on skills while raising thousands of

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Director speaks out on AI direction, BDO zone

By Susan DeLaire
Business to Business

Economic Alliance of Lewis County Executive Director Todd Chaput discussed progress Clean Fiber is making during the Experience Chehalis Friday with Friends meeting on Feb. 13, noting they've signed a lease with the Port of Chehalis and will be working at the port. Clean Fiber makes insulation out of waste byproducts such as cardboard and wood fibers, he said, adding the company already has a plant in Buffalo, New York.

Right now they're getting fiber from Longview and are working on a process for creating it out of natural wood fibers. Clean Fiber will employ between 20 to 40 people, he added.



Todd Chaput

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Chamber of Commerce hosts annual banquet

By Buddy Rose
Business to Business

Centralia College hosted the Centralia-Chehalis Chamber of Commerce annual banquet on Jan. 23. More than 250 people attended the event held in the TransAlta Commons. Highlights included a silent and live auction fundraiser, a buffet dinner followed by the always fun dessert dash and a number of awards presented by chamber staff.

Awards included the Evergreen Award, Chamber Ambassador of the Year and the chamber's Business of the Year. The following information about those awards was provided by the chamber:

Evergreen Award – Paula Burrows

Paula Burrows is one of Lewis County's true community champions and exemplifies the heart and spirit of the Evergreen Award. Through sustained philanthropy, hands-on service and visionary leadership, Burrows has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to improving the lives of children, families and community members throughout Lewis County and beyond.

One of her most significant accomplishments is co-founding Lewis County Footsteps of Hope, established in December 2024 to address food insecurity and basic needs for students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade in Lewis County. In its first year alone, the organization has supported approximately 390 students by providing weekly food backpacks, extended-weekend food



Photo courtesy of Centralia-Chehalis Chamber of Commerce

Business of the Year award at the annual chamber banquet went to Sticklin-Brown Funeral Chapel. Staff shown here from left to right: Lucy Davis, Jordan Keffeler, Christine Vierra, Amanda Curry, Billy Piontek and Samuel Gallow.

assistance and limited access to family pantries at high-need schools. As funding allows, the program continues to expand.

Beyond food access, Footsteps of Hope has distributed approximately 550 coats, 250 pairs of shoes, 1,300 articles of clothing and multiple essential hygiene items. Burrows' direct service also includes long-standing support of organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club of Lewis County, Hope Alliance, The United Way of Lewis County, The Forgotten Children's Fund, Lewis County Young Life, and The

Twirl Foundation. Through sponsorships, donations and event leadership, she has helped expand youth programming, early childhood literacy initiatives, and access to camps and enrichment opportunities.

2025 Ambassador of the Year – Cory Moses

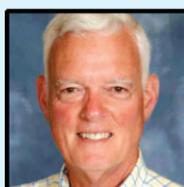
Cory Moses has been named the chamber's 2025 Ambassador of the Year in recognition of her long-

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