

Register Pajaronian

WATSONVILLE PAJARO FREEDOM AROMAS CORRALITOS CASTROVILLE APTOS LA SELVA BEACH ROYAL OAKS ELKHORN MOSS LANDING

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Chamber names award recipients

Man, woman, business, event, organization of the year named

By TODD GUILD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture on Friday announced its 2011 man, woman, event, organization and business of the year.

For the annual award, the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce chooses individuals, organizations and events that "enhance the community's quality of life, economic vitality and

image," according to the chamber.

"Basically, these people have been in the community for a very long time," said operations manager Diane Rossi.

Watsonville Relay for Life was named event of the year and Court Appointed Special Advocates organization of the year.

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Taylor's Office City at 440 Main St. was chosen as business of the year.

Co-owner Scott Taylor said his parents bought the business in 1969. He said that the store has stayed in business, despite difficult economic times, thanks to businesses such as S. Martinelli & Co., which still purchases its office furniture there.

"Without people like that, we wouldn't be in business," he said.

Man of the Year Gary Smith served as Watsonville Fire Chief from 1984-99. When the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake struck, he took over as assistant city manager and served in both capacities until 1999.

He has worked with the Salvation Army, helped feed the homeless and served on the Pajaro Valley Unified School District Personnel Commission.

For the past three years, Smith has worked with the Ammonia Safety and Training Institute, an international organization he helped to create to provide training in dealing with hazardous substances.

"I was very surprised and honored," he said of his nomination. "There's no doubt that Watsonville is home for me. When you get a chance to be a part of a community like this, it's appropriate that you give back to it."

Long-time Watsonville High School teacher Diane Severin was chosen as Woman of the Year.

"I was overwhelmed because I don't know what I've done," she said. "I'm just an ordinary person. I'm just part of the community."

Severin, 80, started teaching at Watsonville High School in 1955, and officially retired about 20 years ago. But that didn't keep her away from her former profession.

She started teaching home

economics, and helped design the school's home economics building.

She was the first teacher at the school to allow boys to take cooking classes, and is currently helping WHS rebuild a food program that will eventually become an elective class.

She also taught a class called Sport Scene Sewing, where students would make tents, ski wear and down jackets, which she said was popular with male students.

"Those boys would be at my door first thing in the morning," she said.

Severin eventually earned a special education credential, and taught those classes for a number of years before she returned to home economics.

She recently returned to WHS, where she is working with 20 special education students who are struggling with school.

In addition, she has substituted for many WHS teachers.

"I have never really retired," she said.

When she was 60 and newly retired from teaching, she took up skeet shooting.

"I wasn't very good, but I enjoyed it," she said.

Severin also traveled to Peru, Italy and Mongolia, and went to Tennessee, where she worked with Women's Builders for Habitat to install baseboards.

She serves on the Pajaro Valley Historical Association board of directors and has volunteered for the past 20 years in the home arts department at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. She has also volunteered with Pajaro Valley Loaves and Fishes and was chosen as Teacher of the Year by the local Special Parents Information Network.

"I loved being a part of the staff at WHS," she said. "I think teenage kids are wonderful. I love seeing them grow up and seeing what they become."

Severin also said she enjoys



Severin



Smith

the challenge of identifying the different lives and providing for the individual emotional needs of her students.

"When they walk into my room, it's a safe place," she said.

Longtime educator and former Pajaro Valley Unified School District trustee Rhea DeHart was selected for a lifetime achievement award.

DeHart, 89, earned her bachelor's degree in literature from Mount Holyoke in 1942, and a year later earned a master's degree in history and constitutional law.

She taught in Brunswick, Ga., from 1943-46; in Durham, N.C., from 1946-47; and in Bryson City, Ga., from 1948-60.

She worked as a PVUSD teacher from 1963-84, but did not retire. She has been teaching at Watsonville/Aptos Adult Education for 10 years.

DeHart also has devoted much of her life in Watsonville to public service.

She has served on the Watsonville Redistricting Committee, the Planning Commission and the PVUSD fiscal and facilities committee. She served as a PVUSD trustee from 2002-06.

She has also served on the Pajaro Valley Performing Arts Association and the PVUSD's Migrant Head Start program.

On Oct. 11, she was selected to be Councilman Emilio Martinez's representative on the city's Parks and Recreation Commission.

"I was absolutely floored," DeHart said. "As a matter of fact, when (PV Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture chairwoman Katie Mahan) called, I said, 'Are you sure you've got the right person?'"

"What a way to begin my 90th year," she added.

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The Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture will host the 50th annual awards dinner on Jan. 28. Tickets cost \$65. Reservations are required. For information, call 724-3900.



DeHart