

Ligonier chamber honors Avalon Village

BY BOB BUTTGEN

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LIGONIER — It was a night for standing ovations and surprises when the Ligonier Chamber of Commerce held its annual awards banquet Tuesday at Ligonier United Methodist Church.

Three people from different backgrounds, but who share the same desire to help others, were presented with the night's top awards.

Michael Weimer, a teacher at West Noble Middle School, and Jeanna Hagen, a full-time community volunteer, were honored as Ligonier's Citizens of the Year. In addition, Kris Funk, 19, was given the Youth Community Service Award in honor of the many hours he has donated to his community.

Also, Avalon Village, a nursing home and health-care facility, was named Business of the Year.

An audience of about 150 guests — the largest gathering over the past 10 years for the chamber event — also heard a talk from guest speaker Dr. Douglas Rex of Indianapolis. A 1972 graduate of West Noble High School, Rex is one of the nation's leading experts on colonoscopies and related medical issues.

The evening's events were concluded when chamber president Suzanne Kistler from Silgan Plastics in Ligonier turned the president's gavel over to Taya Jacobs of Avalon Village.

For Weimer, the award came as a surprise to the longtime teacher. "I am truly honored and surprised to receive this award," said Weimer. Until he was called up to the podium, chamber officials and family members had been able to keep it a secret that Weimer was being honored.

He was recognized for the many things he does for his church and community, as well as his students and his school.

He's an active volunteer at Stone's Hill Community Church in Ligonier, and its youth ministry, and serves as the church's media coordinator.

He's also volunteered countless hours for the past six years to the work of Operation Foundation, an all-volunteer effort that starts today in Ligonier.

Weimer also recently volunteered to donate his time and talent as a sound technician to the Ligonier High School annual reunion, set for Aug. 5.

Last year, there was a serious accident in front of his house that left a woman seriously injured. Weimer and his wife, April, were one of the first rescuers on the scene and provided valuable assistance.

Hagen has assembled a resume of volunteerism that would make many people envious. She has served multiple terms as president of the Noble County Community Foundation and its board.

She's active in church and school activities. For the last five years she has taken a leadership role in the Community Mission Auction that will take place on Aug. 18 in Ligonier.

The auction raises tens of thousands of dollars by having 13 area churches work together.



Suzanne Kistler, left, is the outgoing president of the Ligonier Chamber of Commerce. Tuesday night she presented the chamber's Business of the Year award to Avalon Village. Accepting the honor on behalf of the nursing home were employees, from second from left, Taya Jacobs, Jessica Slone and Alyssa Gross.

Hagen is also responsible for many behind-the-scenes efforts to improve the quality of life in Noble County.

"I am not worthy of this award," she said after being introduced. "I am just so grateful to live in a community where so many people are willing to help others."

She and husband, Mark, and their three children, Nick, Sam and Katie, reside in rural Cromwell.

As a teenager, Funk was recognized for the many hours he has donated to the Ligonier Marshmallow Festival for the past several years, as well as the Cromwell Days event that took place last weekend.

But he is most passionate in his work to raise funds and awareness of breast cancer, as his mother died last year from that disease. He has worked with the Relay for Life and special events at Owen's Supermarket in Ligonier to raise money for the fight against breast cancer.

In accepting his award, Funk said he would continue working to find a cure for breast cancer.

Officers for the coming year for the Ligonier Chamber of Commerce include Jacobs as president; Lisa Shaw as vice president; Jolene Durham and Deb Imbody as secretaries and Lori Cunningham, treasurer.