Awards given by Chamber/GIC/DAD.

Community members and owners of businesses and industries were “on the move” Friday during the annual Gothenburg Chamber of Commerce/Gothenburg Improvement Company/annual banquet Friday night.

“We’re On the Move” was the theme of the banquet at Walkers Steakhouse & Lounge which honored members and others for their contributions to Gothenburg in 2012.

Race cars and Lincoln Highway signs decorated tables to go with the theme.

Receiving Pony Express Rider awards were the Cindermates and the Gothenburg Community Playhouse. Also named as award winners were Barry and Gwen McDiarmid for the annual “Shining Light” celebration they host each year.

The awards are given to individuals or groups who go above or beyond the call of duty or who contribute to the economic stability of the community.

Community Development Office director Anne Anderson said the Cindermates, who raised

more than $122,000 to renovate the Gothenburg High School track, have also hosted a junior high championship track and field meet for several years which Cindermates board member Jim Clark said is just “the tip of the iceberg” of possibilities for events at the track.

Those in attendance at the meet “stayed in our hotels, are in our restaurants and bought gas at our service stations,” Anderson said.

The Shining Light celebration began before the Christmas holiday of 2001.

“Each holiday, the McDiarmids have strung more than 150,000 Christmas lights and over two miles of extension cords to transform the KOA campground into a Christmas wonderland,” Anderson said.

Free-will donations, totalling between $2,000 and $3,000 yearly during a vehicle drive through the campground, are given to various charities.

The Sun Theatre received the third rider award for improvements to the theatre since the Gothenburg Community Playhouse bought the building in 1988.

Playhouse members have replaced neon lighting, remodeled the concession stand and stage and created new dressing rooms.

Most recently, they raised more than $130,000 to buy and install a digital projector, a sound/lighting booth and sound system, created a wheelchair accessible area and replaced curtains to enhance sound. A new screen will be installed soon.

Members are now in a drive to raise an additional $50,000 to replace theatre seats, carpet and refinish the wooden floor.

Recognized for their commitment to economic development of the city were Chris Healey, Dawson Tire and Wheel and Eastside Animal Center.

GIC president Mike Bacon said Healey, a local businessman, helped with the creation of the Wild Horse Golf Course and, most recently, bought and renovated a downtown building which has been renovated into office space—including new quarters for the Chamber and GIC.

Shopko Hometown, that opened in November of 2012, was honored for its commitment to Gothenburg.

The former Pamida merged with Shopko Hometown which serves smaller rural communities.

“It’s been updated inside and has more items for sale,” Bacon said. “It’s tough for retail in smaller communities.”

Dawson Tire & Wheel, which has served customers since 1998, was recognized for adding space to a building on Highway 30 and constructing a new facility on Cottonwood Drive.

Bacon also noted the business’s development of RhinoGator, a new generation of high-density plastic tire designed by Dawson Tire & Wheel to be used on irrigation pivots.

Eastside Animal Center, received an award for an expansion of its building and the purchase of

another building, which used to be Gothenburg Animal Hospital on the west edge of town, in 2011 that was demolished.

Gothenburg Memorial Hospital, which Dawson Area Development director Jen Wolf described as having a huge impact on the local economy, was honored for its investment in Gothenburg that has included two expansion projects since construction of the facility in 1969.

Wolf noted that GMH is making an investment in technology in installing electronic health records and was named one of the top 30 critical access hospitals in the nation.

Mick Brant, the new CEO of the hospital, accepted the award.

Stephanie Nichols, coordinator for the Advocating for Business Labor Education (ABLE) program, said Maggie Tiller, a biology teacher at Gothenburg Public Schools, was the recipient of an ABLE leadership award for projects her students do with The Groundwater Foundation and other water awareness groups.

In reviewing 2012, Bacon talked about the reorganization of GIC with the addition of four vice presidents and progress in the development of an industrial site southwest of town.

“DED (Nebraska Department of Economic Development officials) say it’s the best rail access site for Union Pacific in the state,” he said.

Outgoing Chamber president Jim Widdifield reviewed highlights during the past year and noted what a great community Gothenburg is for kids.

Bret Tiller, the 2013 president, also talked about Chamber activities noting, in particular, a new Pony Express Barbecue Challenge event set for April 26-27 that will bring in teams from Nebraska, Colorado, Iowa and Kansas and a new scholarship the Chamber has added for students pursuing agriculture.

Thirteen Chamber of Commerce ambassadors were recognized as members of the president's club after accumulating 200 or more points in 2012 for representing the chamber and helping with various activities in Gothenburg and surrounding communities.

Honorees and their point totals were: Matt Olsen, 335; Joyce Kolbo, 320; Lorie Hoesel, 315; Donna McConnell, 300; Steve Peterson, 295; Charolett Janssen, 280; Verlin Janssen and Brent Block, 275; Anne Franzen, 255; Laurie Moody, 245; Cindy Soller, 240; Michelle Hecox, 220; and Raelyn Maxwell, 200.

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