Individuals honored for service. February’s Winter Olympics carried over to the annual Gothenburg Chamber of Commerce/Gothenburg Improvement Company annual banquet Friday night.

“Go for the Gold” was the theme of the gathering at Walkers Steakhouse & Lounge where members, businesses and individuals and others were honored for contributions to Gothenburg in 2013.

Recognized for their commitment to economic development were new businesses Hecox Dentistry, the Howard Johnson hotel and Nebraska Barn & Grill restaurant, Gothenburg Eyecare and Optical and Charm Boutique.

Honored for their relocation, expansion and renovation of businesses were RTI Computer Sales & Service and Five-Star Flooring.

Gothenburg State Bank president Matt Williams received a GIC award for his commitment to and investment in the community and his work on the national and international stage as chair of the American Banking Association.

Receiving Pony Express Rider awards were three individuals—community members Jane Herndon, Jack Soller and Community Development Office director Anne Anderson.

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

Herndon was honored for her service at Hilltop Estates where she bakes and serves pies, plays the piano and spends time with elderly residents.

Soller was recognized for military service to his country and his long-time membership in Gothenburg’s Honor Guard.

Anderson, who will retire this year after 14 years, is the longest-serving director of the organization.

GIC president Mike Bacon said the community has grown in valuation, added jobs and more under her directorship.

“She’s taken the Chamber far and above where they started,” Bacon said.

Two individuals were honored by DAD.

Gothenburg High School guidance counselor Jerry Wiggins received an Advocating for Business labor Education award for assisting Gothenburg with a ReVision process in which curriculum was evaluated and opportunities identified for more career and technical education.

Jen Wolf, DAD director, said Wiggins has also has been an advocate for the ABLE program since its inception.

Terry Jessen received DAD’s Area Development’s Partner in Progress award for his investment in Nebraska Barn & Grill restaurant and buying and remodeling the former Super 8 hotel into a Howard Johnson hotel.

“The first time he was here, he had a vision for a new hotel,” said Jen Wolf, DAD director, in reference to the first hotel Jessen built which is the Comfort Suites.

Jessen was also recognized for other real estate investments in Gothenburg.

In reviewing 2013, Bacon said the organization is transitioning leadership to younger members, is planning to break ground this summer with infrastructure on an industrial site southwest of town and is trying to recruit a fiber optic operator to town.

Outgoing Chamber president Bret Tiller reviewed highlights of the past year and talked about old and new events such as the Pony Express BBQ Challenge that will get underway for the second year April 25 and 26.

The 2014 president, Matt Weiss, talked about bringing new energy, ideas and enthusiasm to the position, noting that challenges can be viewed as stepping stones or obstacles.

Weiss said it’s important to define the organization’s vision and holding on to what works and accepting new ideas.

Sixteen Chamber of Commerce ambassadors were recognized as members of the president’s club after accumulating 200 or more points in 2013 for representing the chamber and helping with various activities in Gothenburg and surrounding communities.

Honorees and their point totals were: Donna McConnell, 365; Steve Peterson, 340; Verlin Janssen, 295; Denise Romatzke, 290; Anne Franzen, 280; Lorie Hoesel and Janell Rossen, 275; Charolett Janssen, 295; Brent Block, 265; Michelle Hecox and Rana Williamson, 250; Cindy Soller, 230; Raelyn Maxwell, Tonya Steuben and Matt Olsen, 220; and Bret Tiller, 205.

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