

The logo for Wayne Independent is a red rectangle with the words "WAYNE" and "INDEPENDENT" stacked vertically in white, serif, all-caps font.

Goodbye, Annetta DeYoung...Hello, New York?

By Sarah Thomas

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The glitterati of Wayne County's business community descended in force upon Ehrhardt's Waterfront Restaurant in Tafton for the annual Chamber of Commerce Dinner on Wednesday evening. The hundreds of assembled guests enjoyed delicious food and some very entertaining Keynote Speakers, but there was a price—a tearful farewell to the retiring Annetta DeYoung, who has helped shape the destiny of the Chamber for two decades.

Before that unhappy moment, however, there was a promise of progress from a singular source. Susan Shaffer, the Director of Workforce Initiatives for Wall Street West.

“On September 11th, the world changed,” was Shaffer's arresting opening line. She went on to explain the chaos into which the country was plunged as the single largest nexus of financial information was compromised. It was clear that a new backup data system should be established; one which was close enough to New York to allow fiberoptic data transfer but far enough away to escape damage in case of attack.

“There were other factors,” she said. “Hurricane Katrina...even the retirement of the baby boomers showed that we weren't keeping pace with the needs of the business community. So we came up with WIRED (Workforce Innovations in Regional Economic Development).”

WIRED aims to set up many of these data centers, Wall Street West merely being our local one. The plans are extensive and inspiring, leading Shaffer to talk about job creation, keeping college graduates in the area, and a higher standard of living for all citizens of Wayne County.

In addition to extolling the future, the dinner also honored those business leaders in the community who have made a positive impact on the here and now. Jeff George of Highlights For Children was presented with the Community Achievement Award for his tireless dedication to Wayne County.

“He has been tireless with his aid to the community, both in his contributions to business such as his indelible lettering and graphics contributed to Roots 'n Rhythm and his work in the United Fish Company Coffeehouse,” said the letter written by his colleagues at Highlights. George was also read a statement of gratitude from Senator Lisa Baker, who was unable to attend the event.

“Well, so much for flying under the radar,” joked George as he accepted the award amid the glare of flashbulbs. “I couldn’t be here without tremendous local and business support, a mountain of volunteers, and the help of many of the young people in our area. I think God entrusted me with a small set of skills, and if I kept those skills to myself it’d be selfish.”

Honored as Business Person of the Year was Vince Benedetto of Bold Gold Media Group, whose fascinating career progression has included a stint in the United States Armed Forces.

“The best thing about receiving this award is it gives me a minute to brag about all the wonderful people I work with who helped make this happen,” Benedetto said. “When I was in the Air Force, the best advice I received was to attach myself to the smartest NCO (non-commissioned officer) I could find and learn how to become a leader. I hope I’ve done so.”

But at last, there was no more putting it off. The Chamber had to bid farewell to one of its most familiar faces, Executive Director Annetta DeYoung.

“I don’t know what to say,” said an obviously moved DeYoung after receiving the commendations from her peers, and even the Governor of Pennsylvania. She expressed her gratitude and justifiable pride in the many undertakings of the Chamber of Commerce during her tenure, such as the completion of the Wayne County Visitor’s Center and the Tour of Honor.

“They said we couldn’t do it, but we did it. Thank you all so much.”