

# The stars come out

## Businesses recognized for last year's hirings, expansions

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**BENTON TOWNSHIP** — Hundreds of Southwest Michigan businesses owners, presidents and CEOs gathered at the Mendel Center for what was the business equivalent of the Oscars.

While there was no red carpet Wednesday morning, businesses received awards for their accom-

plishments at the 2016 Business Recognition Breakfast — held by the Cornerstone Chamber of Commerce and Cornerstone Alliance.

The annual award ceremony, held for more than 20 years, changed from an evening event to a morning festivity upon feedback from chamber members.

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Tony Wittkowski / HP staff

**Cornerstone Alliance President Rob Cleveland speaks Wednesday morning during the 2016 Business Recognition Breakfast at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center. The breakfast honored and touched upon what several Southwest Michigan businesses have done in 2015.**

## STARS

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Cornerstone Alliance President Rob Cleveland and Cornerstone Chamber of Commerce President Chris Heugel addressed the crowd about their organizations' plans for 2016.

The awards handed out for business achievements were as follows:

**SILVER STAKE AWARD:** Silver Stake Award winners either created 25 jobs, increased sales or unit volume by 25 percent, expanded facilities by 10 percent, or increased capital investment by at least \$100,000.

Winners included: Prism Environmental Services and B&L Information Systems.

**GOLD STAKE AWARD:** Gold Stake Award winners either created 50 jobs, increased sales or unit volume by 50 percent, expanded facilities by 25 percent, or increased capital investment by at least \$200,000.

Winners included: Pearson Construction Co. and LakeHouse Restaurant & Bar.

**PLATINUM STAKE AWARD:** Platinum Stake Award winners either created 100 jobs, increased sales or unit volume by 100 percent, expanded facilities by 50 percent, or increased their capital investment by at least \$300,000.

Winners included: Zoup!; Williamson Employment; Mid-West Family Broadcasting; Abonmarche Consultants Inc.; Honor Credit Union; Johnson-Rauhoff; United Federal Credit Union; Elwood Staffing; Wightman & Associates, Inc.; Mosquito Squad of Southwest Michigan; OnStaff USA and Express Employment Professionals.

### MANUFACTURING / DISTRIBUTION LARGE BUSINESS

**AWARD:** Colson Group USA, a maker of caster and wheel products, took home the Manufacturing/Distribution Large Business Award this year. The company is nearing completion of the build-out of its new national distribution center in St. Joseph, which opened in January.

**FOOD PROCESSING LARGE BUSINESS AWARD:** Pero Family Farms Food Co. LLC won the Food Processing Large Business Award. In 2015, the company announced the expansion of its existing cold storage and distribution factory to a fresh-cut vegetable operation in Benton Harbor. The expansion is expected to be completed in late 2016.

**MERLIN HANSON EXEMPLARY BUSINESS LEADER AWARD:** Robert Harrison, who retired as president for Lake Michigan College in January, was given the Merlin Hanson Exemplary Business Leader Award. Harrison secured a \$17 million capital outlay grant from the state during his tenure, which will be used to upgrade the Napier Campus.

**ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR AWARD – MANUFACTURING SECTOR:** Lindberg/MPH, which supplies capital equipment to a customer base representing automotive, die casting, agriculture and transportation, was the manufacturing sector's Entrepreneur of the Year. Lindberg/MPH teamed up with LMC to develop an on-site training curriculum for blueprint reading and welding skills.

**ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR AWARD – COMMERCIAL SECTOR:** Wightman & Associates, Inc., an organization that focuses on engineering, environmental, architecture and survey services, was the

commercial sector's Entrepreneur of the Year. In June, Wightman & Associates merged with Wightman Environmental. The Wightman team has worked with Western Michigan University's civil engineering program by mentoring annual senior design projects.

**LARGE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR AWARD:** United Federal Credit Union was the recipient of the Large Business of the Year Award. In the last few years, UFCU began a multi-phase building project focused on supporting its future planned growth.

**OTHER AWARD WINNERS:** The Green Business Award recognizes a business that puts green initiatives into its work place by showing sustainable energy and creating "green" awareness.

This year's recipient, Wightman & Associates, reduced its consumption of plastic cutlery and composted coffee grounds. Wightman built an on-site compost bin for its garden. The community garden was suggested by the Wightman GREEN Team, which focuses on developing sustainable and environmentally conscious practices.

Jimmy John's won the Excellence in Customer Service Award for the retail sector and Edgewater Bank was given the Excellence in Customer Service Award for the service sector.

Jo Farrell was named the Cornerstone Chamber of Commerce Ambassador of the Year for 2015. Ambassadors are comprised of local business professionals that volunteer their time to chamber events. Farrell attended every chamber event in 2015.

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