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## **Embargo until 9:00 pm January 28, 2016**

January 27, 2016

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# **NEWS**

### **CHAMBER HOLDS ANNUAL MEETING - ANNUAL AWARDS PRESENTED**

**Vero Beach, FL....** The annual meeting of the [Indian River County Chamber of Commerce](http://www.indianriverchamber.com) was held January 27, 2016 at the Vero Beach Country Club. The program was led by 2016 Chairman of the Board Jeff Schlitt, Schlitt Services and Chamber President Penny Chandler.

During the meeting, 2015 highlights of the Chamber's 2015 annual report were presented including the continued work in bringing factual information to the Chamber members and public about proposed high speed passenger rail crossing Indian river County. Chamber President Penny Chandler noted that "Ninety-nine years ago, the Chamber registered a complaint with the state railroad commission about freight trains blocking City of Vero Beach street crossings." She added "Just last month, the Chamber reminded the Federal Railroad Commission, Army Corps of Engineers, the St Johns River Water Management District and others of our continued concerns about the All Aboard Florida Project."

To date, 186 people have graduated from the Chamber's Leadership Indian River County program. Many graduates now serve on area boards or have been elected to public office. In 2015 there were 8 scholarships provided by area businesses for the

program.

In 2015, the Chamber hosted two Florida Delegation events, a luncheon featuring the U.S. Chamber on national affairs, and the “State of the County Address” delivered by our County Administrator and the Chairman of the County Commission. The Chamber also held 81 separate business events with over 3,900 in registered attendees.

Through the Chamber’s economic development office, personal customized assistance was provided to economic development prospects such as an algae to nutraceuticals company locating at the former juvenile corrections facility site south of the county landfill, a call center that provides telephone, direct mail and social media fund-raising services, an aircraft parts manufacturer interested in establishing a presence in the U.S., and an agricultural-based research facility expanding its production operations into Fellsmere, adding up to 200 employees.

The Chamber’s Tourism office attracted thousands of visitors. Bed tax collections demonstrated a continued success in increasing the number of quality overnight visitors to Indian River County. At the end of the 2015 fiscal year, tourist tax revenues increased over the previous year by 19.2%. The Chamber’s digital tourism marketing campaigns reached over 40 million impressions. Visitor commercials reached an audience of over 2.5 million households in the U.S. with another 13 million commercials in the Toronto and Montreal Transit Commissions and Toronto financial district.

The annual meeting is also an event to recognize and congratulate area business and government leaders for their roles in the Vero Beach and Indian River County community

The Chamber recognized Alyssa Dritenbas of Childcare Resources of Indian River as the 2015 Young Professional of the Year. The 2015 Ambassador of the Year Award was presented to Marc Richard, Postal Connections.

Michael Walther, Coastal Tech G.E.C., Inc. was recognized for his contributions earning the 2015 Director's Award. Stated Penny Chandler "Walther began his first term on the Chamber's Board of Directors in 2014. He has served on the Chamber's Government Issues Committee for over 15 years and currently co-chairs that committee. As a Board member, Walther brings a focus and wealth of knowledge to the table on water and lagoon concerns, so important to our county."

The Chamber's 2015 Volunteer of the Year was presented to Anna Valencia-Tillery, White Glove Moving & Storage and PakMail Beachside. Mr. Valencia-Tillary serves on the Young Professional Network Advisory Committee, and is an active Chamber Ambassador. She also serves on the Chamber's Industry Appreciation Awards Committee.

The 2015 Member of the Year Award was presented to the employees of Marine Bank & Trust Company. The award acknowledges a Chamber member or business who, through their involvement positively impacts Chamber programs and member services. "Marine Bank Presidents and employee have been involved in the Chamber for 19 years as volunteers and in leadership roles" stated Chamber Chairman Jeff Schlitt.

The 2015 Chairman's Award was presented to Joe Baird, Indian River County Administrator. In making the presentation it was stated that "Joe has been an advocate for our taxpayers, and a supporter of economic development and tourism. In the 1980's, employed as the County's Assistant Utilities Manager, Joe helped to build up the county utilities department at a time when it struggled financially. In doing so they expanded county services." Following the 2004 hurricanes, Baird worked with the business community to connect employees with positions in the county for hurricane recovery providing employment to hundreds of dislocated workers. His efforts working with area utility providers got key areas of the county connected as soon as possible following those storms.

In 2007, Baird moved County employees moved from a mold infested facility to a new \$45 million county administration building - paid for in cash thanks to Baird's fiscally conservative approach. Also built under his administration were the Supervisor of Elections building, the state of the art Emergency Services building, the joint County – School Board fleet complex and expansions at the Indian river County Jail.

Baird was also instrumental on the Piper Aircraft retention team working with the Chamber staff and the Piper site selector to retain the jobs of our largest private employer in this County.

The 2015 Carolyn K. Eggert Economic Development Award was established in 1999 in memory of Carolyn K. Eggert. Eggert was a community leader who served in a variety of capacities - including her elected position on the Indian River County Board of County Commissioners where she was a staunch supporter and champion of economic development and job creation. The 2015 Award recognized Tim Girard, President of Girard Equipment for his leadership and commitment to help Indian River County and the Chamber's efforts to create and maintain quality, year round jobs for the citizens of Indian River County.

The prestigious 2015 Alma Lee Loy Community Service Award was presented to Beverly S. and Martin L. Paris of Paris Productions. The award, established in 1995, recognizes individuals who distinguish themselves professionally through excellence and privately through commitment to the community at large. Since its inception, winners of this award have been community leaders known to all of us for their service to our community.

The Paris' came to Vero Beach in 1989. Since then, they have been known for establishing signature events, their associations in business, working with non-profit and religious groups, and maintaining solid relationships with the media and

government” stated Chamber Chairman Jeff Schlitt. “Their work has helped put Vero Beach non-profits on the map raising millions of dollars which are put back into the community through many non-profit programs and services” said Schlitt.

Examples of their work and involvement include Downtown Friday, the resurrection of the historic Hibiscus Festival, expanded Christmas decorations for downtown Vero Beach, and the Mental Health Association’s signature event, TurtleTrax. The two helped launch the popular “*Celebrated Speakers Series*” presented by the Emerson Center, and they helped to frame, promote and publicize “The Ride To Beat Hunger”, a 3,300 mile minister’s bike ride from California to Vero Beach raising money for global hunger and hunger here on the Treasure Coast for Harvest Food Outreach.

Marty and Beverly Paris serve on the planning committee and handle the Indian River County Healthy Start Coalition’s signature event, “*Dancing With Vero’s Stars.*” After 7 years, the event has raised over \$1.2 million providing programs for pregnant women and young children in our community to receive necessary healthcare and support services

The Paris’ have received numerous other awards and recognition during their careers. Schlitt added “although you both have threatened to retire, we are happy that you continue your work as volunteers and professionals in our community”.

During 2016, the Chamber’s work plan includes: bringing valuable information, programs and services to help Vero Beach and Indian River County businesses; job creation and retention; new tourism marketing initiatives and, we convening of executives from our the community to work together on Vero Beach and Indian River County initiatives” stated Chairman Schlitt.

The [Indian River County Chamber of Commerce](#) is a county-wide organization representing nearly 900 Vero Beach and Indian River County businesses and proud to provide top level training as a value-added benefit for our members. Located in Vero

Beach, the Chamber represents the business community by providing services, benefits and leadership for positive growth and change. For more information about the Chamber visit the website at [www.indianriverchamber.com](http://www.indianriverchamber.com) or call 772-567-3491.

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