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SEABERG FORMALLY INDUCTED INTO HALL

Chamber announces its annual awards at event

ATCHISON, Kan. (Jan. 20, 2009) — Walk into almost any historic public building in Atchison and it's likely that Ladd Seaberg's name will be featured on some kind of plaque or list of benefactors. His financial contributions are well known around the community. But that's not the first thing that comes to Rick Berger's mind when he thinks of Seaberg's legacy.

"The Hall of Fame was established to recognize individuals who had generously given their time and financial support to enhance the economic well being of the Atchison area. What really impresses me most about Ladd is not the financial support, which we all know has been huge, but it was the time," said Berger, one of seven people who spoke about Seaberg, including both United States Senators from Kansas. "We all know that time is precious. The fact that Ladd chooses to spend his time for us is very impressive."

Because of those efforts, Seaberg was formally inducted into the Atchison Area Chamber of Commerce Hall of Fame during the organizations 90th annual banquet Saturday night at the Atchison Heritage Conference Center.

"Communities have anchor people," said Sen. Brownback, "someone you can build a community around. That's what Ladd is. And not every community has those."

In addition to his achievements at MGP Ingredients, Seaberg has been involved with several trade and business organizations on a regional and national level.

Much of his work, however, has been done in the Atchison area, including his work on the boards of several local businesses, his time with the Santa Fe Depot Board of Trustees and his efforts with the Independence Creek Lewis & Clark Historical Site.

Sen. Pat Roberts, who spoke via video, echoed Sen. Brownback's comments.

"When there is a need, you can always find the Seaberg's," he said. "Ladd is on it, and he delivers."

The final speaker, Bud Cray, was a 1992 Hall of Fame inductee. He is also Seaberg's father-in-law and mentor.

Cray spoke of how his daughter, Karen, and Ladd, a Texas native, met at a science fair. Both won their share of awards, something Cray kept in mind. Eventually, he convinced Seaberg to return to Atchison, both as a business associate and a son-in-law.

“Our company would have been very different if this bright young couple had not come back to Atchison,” Cray said. “I’m mighty proud of you, Ladd.”

Not only did the speakers touch on Seaberg’s leadership and generosity with his time and money, they also told much more personal stories.

Mike Braude said one of the greatest moments of his business life was when Seaberg and Cray asked him to join the MGP Ingredients board of directors. He said he’s still striving to live up to the standard set by the two Hall of Famers.

“I’m 72 and when I grow up I want to be Bud Cray,” he joked.

Randy Shrick, another MGP Ingredients board member, called Seaberg his mentor. He said Seaberg taught him one of the most important lessons of his career early on.

“People are our most important asset,” he said. “He expected us to enrich and enhance the lives of our employees and our community. We strive to put people first and Ladd is a great example of that.”

MGP Ingredients isn’t the only business Seaberg has helped along his journey. Rich Dickason, chief executive officer of Exchange National Bank and Trust, recalled the influence Seaberg had as a member of the bank’s board of directors.

The bank thought so highly of Seaberg’s contributions, it had a special Seaberg currency issued and framed for him as a memento.

Seaberg, who fittingly said he’s more at home using a slide rule than a microphone, again challenged those in the audience to be active. And he said Atchison is impressive in that regard.

“Every time I start to tackle a new challenge, I’m amazed at the quantity and quality of volunteers that help make it a success,” Seaberg said. “I was always encouraging MGP employees to get involved in the community. I think all companies should do that.”

Several other Atchison area businesses and individuals were honored during the Chamber’s banquet.

Benedictine College, which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2008, earned the Business of the Year Award for its impact on the Atchison community.

The Team of the Year Award went to the Santa Fe Depot Trustees for its work maintaining and improving the historic depot.

The Quality of Life Award, which honors an individual, group, committee or business whose involvement in the community has enriched the quality of life for residents. The 2008 award went to Butch, Mary and Chad Ball.

Chris Taylor, executive director of the Atchison County Historical Society, earned the Tourism Award for all of the programs the society offers, including bring the Smithsonian exhibit “New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music” to Atchison.

Cheryl Petesch was the Ambassador of the Year.

When Berger thinks back on Seaberg's accomplishments as a community leader, he gets an interesting picture in his mind. And the vision doesn't include any suits and ties, or board rooms, or stockholders.

In fact, what Berger remembers is almost exactly what Seaberg has encouraged his own employees to do.

"I remember him out there on the weekends in that little pickup," Berger said, "clearing brush and pulling up weeds for the Lewis & Clark trail, or putting up tents for the Amelia Earhart Festival. He donates a great deal of money, but even more of his time. It's incredible."

The mission of the Atchison Area Chamber of Commerce is to focus on the quality of life, attraction, growth and retention of jobs and businesses in Atchison County. Established in 1919, the Chamber continues to be the leading business organization of the community. With the support of over 400 member investors, the Chamber delivers programs and services that make our community a better place to live, work, raise a family and visit.

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For more information about the Atchison Area Chamber of Commerce and its Hall of Fame, please call Jacque Pregont at 913-367-2427 or 800-234-1854, or e-mail Jacque at president@atchisonkansas.net.