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Chamber Honors Exceptional Businesses and Volunteers

VALDOSTA, Ga. – The 2nd Annual Chamber Choice Awards Breakfast, sponsored by DuPont Crop Protection and Colony Bank was held Thursday at the Rainwater Conference Center. Nearly 350 Chamber members were in attendance as six prestigious awards were given to outstanding businesses and volunteers from Valdosta-Lowndes County.

The six awards presented were BIG Thinker Award, Small Business of the Year, Ambassador of the Year, Manufacturer of the Year, Young Professional of the Year, and Members' Choice Award.

Giovanni Panizzi was named 2011 BIG Thinker. Panizzi accepted the award from the 2005 BIG Thinker, Tom Stalvey of Ace Electric. The award is presented to a visionary and successful entrepreneur who cares and gives back to his or her community. Panizzi is the owner of TeamTemps Personnel Staffing and the developer of Cypress Lakes Development in Lake Park. Panizzi and his late wife, Carolyn, started TeamTemps with no employees, other than themselves. Celebrating 23 years in business, today TeamTemps has nine employees and serves more than 85 clients, some of which are Fortune 500 companies. Panizzi's advice to entrepreneurs is to be persistent. "It's not always the smartest guy who gets ahead. It's the guy who perseveres," says Panizzi. Panizzi's win was credited to "his dedication, his business success, and his entrepreneurial spirit," Stalvey said.

The Small Business of the Year is Covington's Dining & Catering. Sue Cox accepted the award from the 2010 Small Business of the Year winner Scott James of Talk 92.1. The award acknowledges a creative and innovative small business with 100 or fewer employees that demonstrates growth and stability in the business community. "Covington's is dedicated to upholding the core values of their company—honesty and integrity, hard work and reliability and commitment to quality," James said.

The Ambassador of the Year is Lyndi Soles, Senior Account Executive at LAMAR Advertising. Soles accepted the award from the 2010 winner Michael Anderson of Express Employment Professionals. The award is presented to a Chamber Ambassador who exemplifies outstanding volunteer support. Soles served as the 2010 Ambassadors Committee Chairman, donating more than 100 hours of service, while assisting with numerous Chamber initiatives, as well as providing support to businesses on behalf of

the Chamber. “Lyndi has great sales expertise and top notch customer service,” said James Locke, Lamar’s General Manager.

The 2011 Manufacturer of the Year is Sunset Farm Foods. Tom Carroll accepted the award presented by the 2010 winner, Dupont Crop Protection, represented by John Hamilton. The award exemplifies the elite of manufacturing in economic impact, corporate citizenship and workplace excellence. Sunset Farm Foods manufactures smoked sausages and other prepared meat products and has been in operation in Valdosta since 1918. The company created five new jobs last year and contributes annually to local charitable and community organizations all supported by employees’ direct involvement. “Excellence is a core value for Sunset Farm Foods and they provide numerous programs to support work/life balance for all employees,” said Hamilton.

The Young Professional of the Year was presented to Carrie Johnson, Compliance Coordinator at Smith Drug Company. Sue Cox, Vice Chairman of the Chamber’s Business Expansion Division, presented Johnson with the award which recognizes a young professional who has made a positive impact to his or her business's bottom line. Johnson provided a measurable contribution to the company by passing every compliance inspection and successfully passing a Drug Enforcement Audit. “Carrie has developed an outstanding rapport with Smith Drug Company’s customers which has helped the company maintain its market share through satisfied customers,” Cox said.

The Members’ Choice Award was presented to Coldwell Banker Premier Real Estate. Coldwell Banker Premier Real Estate received the award from the 2010 winner, The Park Avenue Bank, represented by CEO Jay Torbert. The Members’ Choice Award recognizes a Chamber member dedicated to quality customer/client services, raising the expectations of customer service and courtesy in the community. Coldwell Banker Premier Real Estate has been a full-service real estate company since 1973 and has been ranked number one in residential sales for the last several years. Coldwell Banker Premier Real Estate consists of highly-qualified agents who use their market knowledge, experience and insight to meet and exceed the expectations of their customers. Their mission is committed to delivering superior real estate services and striving to maintain the highest level of integrity and professionalism. Coldwell Banker Premier Real Estate believes that the satisfaction of their clients is the only true measure of their successes.

For more information on the 2011 Chamber Choice Awards, visit www.ValdostaChamber.com/ChamberChoiceAwards.

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