

Honoring the city's best

Mark Buser and Mark Jorgenson of the West Linn Chamber of Commerce are named *Tidings* Citizens of the Year; Diane Bays wins the chamber's Business Person of the Year honor

By TRACY STEPP
Tidings Editor

Two men who've led and championed the West Linn Chamber of Commerce were chosen as the *Tidings*' Citizens of the Year for 2005. And a woman who united the wellness community in Willamette was named the chamber's Business Person of the Year.

Mark Jorgenson, chamber president, Mark Buser, chamber vice president, and Diane Bays, owner of Healthy Spaces, were presented with the awards at the chamber's annual dinner last Saturday. Here's a bit about why they won the honors.

The two Marks

"Sometimes it only takes a person who is truly committed to a cause to inspire others to change the world. West Linn is fortunate to have two such people," said *Tidings* Publisher Brian Monihan of Buser and Jorgenson. "Both Marks, because of their commitment, beliefs and drive have taken West Linn to a new level of community involvement."

Jorgenson, who took over as chamber head in 2003, increased the organization's visible presence by giving it office space in his Postal Annex business in Willamette. With a physical office established, the chamber has grown and more than doubled its membership to more than 200 members.



Jorgenson



Buser



Bays

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-- Brian Monihan, *Tidings* publisher

"Three years ago, the challenge of invigorating the chamber was daunting," said Mary Closson, executive director of the chamber. "But by working from a shared vision, (Jorgenson and Buser) created an inclusive environment that encouraged many others to get involved."

"They found a way for everyone to take ownership of the vision; this created a momentum that continues to move the chamber forward today."

Under Jorgenson and Buser, the chamber has grown enough to support hiring part-time office manager Vernielle McIntyre last November. This July, they took the organization to a new level by hiring Closson part time as the chamber's first executive director.

"Mark Buser and Mark Jorgenson possess several key qualities that have allowed them to move the chamber forward in many positive ways," Closson said. "Both are visionary, innovative, hard-working and collaborative."

See WINNERS, page A2

Continued below . . .



STAFF PHOTO / TRACY STEPP
 Above: Diane Bays outside her Willamette business.
 Right: Mark Buser and Mark Jorgenson at the chamber office they know so well.



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Winners: All work to bring visitors to WL

Continued from page A1

This year, Buser and Jorgenson's great achievement was the launch of the successful Farmers & Artists Market in Willamette.

From April and through October, the market has brought as many as 70 vendors and artisans weekly to downtown Willamette and thousands of visitors have followed. Buser calls the Wednesday market a "Cinderella story," and one that continues to bring shoppers to the community.

The chamber also worked to build a collaborative relationship with the city of West Linn, and along with the city, hopes to make the farmers' market an annual fixture in West Linn.

In 2004, the chamber spearheaded an effort to bring more tourists to West Linn by formulating a Visitor Destination Action Plan. Last month, that plan was updated, and which puts the chamber in a position to receive up to \$30,000 in funding from the Clackamas County Tourism Development Council to implement the vision.

The chamber established the Lower Columbia Floods Chapter of the Ice Age Floods Institute, which recently hosted a national meeting and field trip locally. Buser is particularly involved in pushing for West Linn to be an interpretive stop on a potential four-state national trail that will celebrate the geologic history of the Ice Age Floods. In West Linn, that history includes the Willamette Meteorite, which was discovered in 1902 and now is on display in New York. Both men have been working to raise funds for a bronze, full-sized replica of the meteorite, to be created by New York artist Perry Gargano.

Jorgenson, Buser and the chamber, along with the city, also have provided leadership for the West Linn Old Time Fair, and the chamber has computerized its records and supervised development of a Web site. Recently, the chamber agreed to also work with the city in offering support to help Pascagoula, Miss., recover after Hurricane Katrina.

Jorgenson said he was surprised after the announcement of his win.

"I think it's nice to be recognized for the work that you do, but the reward is the work itself," he said. "But this is definitely the cherry on the top of the sundae."

Buser agreed that the Citizen of the Year title was unexpected.

"I've never been honored, it's my first time," he said after hearing the news at the chamber dinner. "It feels good. I'm going to sleep good tonight."

Diane Bays

Bays' "inspiration and hard work" led to the formation of the Willamette Wellness Community, and Wellness Wednesday events in Willamette that began in 2004, said Mary Closson. The wellness community includes dozens of practitioners such as massage therapists, acupuncturists, nutritionists, yoga and meditation instructors and more.

Bays said that even though she wanted to get her own business up and running, she also knew she had a larger role in the community such as getting Willamette's unique business climate noticed.

"I came to (being an) entrepreneur later in life, and I needed to reach out" to neighbors and other business owners, she said.

Bays said she did a walking campaign — "I'd knock on doors" — to get people interested in forming a wellness community. She added that the chamber had just needed someone with "a little chutzpah" to get things rolling.

Bays seems to have chutzpah to spare.

"Diane has consistently showed leadership, support and vision as the project grew and transformed the area," said Closson.

Closson said that Bays continued to show leadership as the Wellness Wednesday events transitioned into First Wednesdays — which included the other Willamette businesses in addition to the wellness community — and from there into the Farmers & Artists Market.

"Willamette is a different, more vibrant community today as a result of her tireless efforts," Closson said.

Bays said she enjoyed bringing together the area's wellness groups, but added she couldn't have done the projects alone.

"We had a wonderful base of volunteers that stepped up," she said. "Willamette was the place to be on Wednesday nights."

And as for her award?

"This really caught me off guard," said Bays of the honor. "I'm pleased that the chamber recognizes people who work for the greater good."