

Mason County life

Chamber's annual gala will honor business, volunteer and citizen of year

By ARLA SHEPHARD
MASON COUNTY LIFE

New businesses, long-time community volunteers and many of Mason County's most dedicated citizens will be honored at the Shelton-Mason County Chamber of Commerce's annual Awards Gala this month.

As the chamber reflects on the past year, with a dinner and program on Jan. 16 at Little Creek Casino Resort in Shelton, the chamber will also name its Business of the Year, Volunteer of the Year and Citizen of the Year.

Business of the Year nominees include Peninsula Credit Union and four female-owned businesses: Kathy Geist's Better On You, Michelle Pugh's Joonbug Yoga, Shelly Barnett's Off the Walls Gallery and Janene Bandes' Pier 101 Gift Shop & Women's Boutique.

Geist re-located her women's boutique Better On You from Union to Shelton in 2013, Pugh expanded her yoga studio in downtown Shelton, Barnett opened her art gallery February 2014, also in Shelton, and Bandes' Hoodspout boutique celebrated 11 years in business last year.

Meanwhile, Peninsula Credit Union has been a mainstay in Mason County since 1935, with branches now in Bel-fair and Shelton.

The credit union's members, as well as the organization, support various community causes, such as Relay For Life, United Way Day of Caring, Ma-

son County Forest Festival and educational grants for local schools.

The nominees for Citizen of the Year are Bill Kendrick, Spencer Jones, Melanie Bakala and Patty Ayala Ross.

Kendrick is a former Seattle Public Schools superintendent who has volunteered as a Rotarian and through his church for more than 40 years.

Since joining the board of Love INC of Mason County in 2010, Kendrick has helped the organization raise more than \$230,000. He's also helped secure funding for a new clubhouse at Alderbrook Golf and has earned numerous awards throughout his career as an educator.

Jones graduated from Shelton High School in 2004, working for a number of years for AmeriCorps before returning to Mason County and joining the team at Hood Canal Communications.

One of his nominators shared that Jones volunteers more than 2,000 hours every year, demonstrated by his volunteer work at Mason County Fire District No. 6 and as vice president of development for South Mason Youth Soccer.

Bakala has served Mason County since 2010 as owner and operator of State Farm Insurance in Shelton, where she offers charitable contributions through toiletry drives to support local causes such as the homeless shelter.

Bakala is also a member of the Skookum Rotary Club, the Shelton-Mason County Chamber and the Mason Gen-

eral Hospital Foundation boards, and has contributed time and energy to Sound Learning, Friends of the Shelton Library and countless nonprofit efforts.

Patty Ayala Ross has been the manager of the Shelton Timberland Library since 2006, where she works hard to set a vision and mission that are community-driven and community-minded.

Ayala Ross has been honored with an American Business Women's Award of the Year in 2004 and in addition to her role at the library, she dedicates herself to several local organizations, including United Way of Mason County, League of Women Voters and Mason County Early Learning Coalition and Sound Learning.

Nominees for Volunteer of the Year include John Lester of Arnold Smith Insurance, Jennifer Owens of Peninsula Credit Union and Susanna Samuelson of Our Community Credit Union.

Lester contributes significantly to the Shelton Kiwanis Club and the chamber; Owens volunteers with Bank On Mason, Shelton Relay for Life and Mason General Hospital Foundation; and Samuelson dedicates her time to United Way of Mason County, the MGH Foundation and the Olympic Middle School P.T.S.O.

Tickets to the chamber's annual awards gala are limited. Contact the chamber for more information at 426-2021 or info@sheltonchamber.org.



PHOTOS BY ARLA SHEPHARD
Kathy Geist moved her boutique Better On You to Shelton at the end of 2013. The business, along with Peninsula Credit Union, Joonbug Yoga, Off the Walls Gallery and Pier 101 Gift Shop are among the nominees for the Shelton chamber's Business of the Year.

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