

"I've been a big fan and supporter of the chamber for many years. I went through their leadership program and I think it just serves a great purpose for the community and they do a great job." – Chamber Citizen of the Year James Eastham

Chamber awards

And the winner's are – drum roll please ...

Mayor, WFTR/WZRV BIG winners at Chamber Awards Dinner



The Main Street Daily Grind received the Chamber's Business of the Year Award

By Roger Bianchini
Warren County Report

The red carpet was down and the stars were out on June 19 at the Shenandoah Valley Golf Club as the Front Royal-Warren County Chamber of Commerce acknowledged outstanding contributions in the local business, public and private sectors.

The chamber's 63rd annual Dinner was billed as "Movie and Awards Night" and the feature presentation was – well, there were six of them:

- Non-Profit of the Year, Blue Ridge Opportunities;
- Education Contributor of the

- Year, Becky Lillard;
- Public Safety Award, Firefighter Gerry Maiatico;
- Business of the Year, Main Street Daily Grind;
- Citizen of the Year, Front Royal Mayor James Eastham;
- Community Impact Award, Royal Broadcasting (parent company of WZRV/WFTR radio)

Perhaps the biggest surprise – well, maybe not, (Sharon's gone) – was the outgoing Front Royal mayor's nod as Citizen of the Year. Eastham certainly looked surprised as his name was called and he acknowledged that surprise in accepting the award. It was within the last year that 61 percent of

the Chamber's membership classified the Town of Front Royal as non-business friendly. However, a change at the top of the chamber's executive staff in the wake of that survey may have indicated a softening of the chamber hierarchy's relationship with the town. Ousted Executive Director Sharon Baroncelli was often viewed as too confrontational with the town on general business and municipal infighting issues by some chamber board members – but that was then, this is now.

A recent change in East Main Street parking restrictions to accommodate new restaurant business hours seems to show the town working hard to improve its relationship with its business community.

"We're always working to make things better," Eastham responded to a query about his up and down year with the chamber. "But I was very surprised. There are plenty of people in the community that are just as deserving, if not more deserving, but I really appreciate the recognition," Eastham said of his award.

Eastham cited his past personal relationship with the chamber as a local businessman.

"I've been a big fan and supporter of the chamber for many years. I went through their leadership program and I think it just serves a great purpose for the community and they do a great job. So, to be honored by them is hard to put into words, it's just a great feeling to be recognized by the chamber," Eastham said.

The two-term (four-year) mayor, who chose not to run for reelection this year, then joked about his final days in office.

"I feel like I'm on a farewell tour," Eastham laughed four days before chairing his final town council meeting. "But it was really nice of them to give me this and I look forward to many more years of working with the chamber and what they're about in the community," the First Bank VP and commercial loan officer concluded.

It was 60 years ago today



Front Royal Mayor James Eastham accepts the chamber's Citizen of the Year Award. Eastham said he was somewhat surprised by his award within a year of the town's getting a thumbs down in a cham-

Perhaps this reporter's favorite moment of the gala, other than the food, was Royal Broadcasting's acknowledgement for Community Impact. Having taken a turn or two behind the ZRV microphone for and with News Director and Valley Today host Mario Retrosi – not to mention my and Dan McDermott's monthly "Reporter's Roundtable" with Retrosi – seeing radio's ongoing role in the community as a news and entertainment source acknowledged made me want to celebrate – Willis, another please.

After the chamber acknowledged WFTR/WZRV's 60 years of service to the community, we questioned Royal Broadcasting President Andrew Sherer on how he has kept up the pace over six decades.

"Well, Marconi and I were contemporaries of one another and Mike [O'Dell] was his right-hand man," Sherer observed of his and his station manager's relationship to the harnesser of the radio wave. "No, the station is 60 years old and it's a rarity to find a station that is that long with the same call letters, with the same basic mission statement. There are almost 12,000 broadcasting entities in the country, yet very few of them are able to have a community support them the

way the community's supported this station."

Actually Sherer and Royal Broadcasting took over WFTR/WZRV, 1030 AM, 95.3 FM in August of 2000.

"I signed the asset purchase agreement in April of 2000, we closed on it on Aug. 15, 2000 and started operations the next day. The FM station was built prior to Peter Strauss buying it, when he bought it was an AM/FM operation in 1981, so it's only really had two owners, Peter and myself," Sherer explained of the station's history as an AM/FM outlet. "This was a surprise – it's truly a reflection of the community and their input and their desire to have a radio station like ours in the community. It's indicative of the people who want to be part of what we do and they make it easy for us to offer that opportunity up," Sherer said.

Sherer almost missed his part in the party as he and station technician Joe Woodall had to leave early to deal with a storm related transmitter problem.

"After we got done with the towers I had to drag him back kicking and screaming, because while some of us knew early in the week, we didn't transmit that knowledge to the boss," Woodall joked about getting Sherer back to the ball in time.



Don't be shy Becky, you deserve it - Becky Lillard realizes she is being talked about as chamber prepares to acknowledge Education Contributor of the Year.