

A.H. Mayor McDonald Keynotes State of the Community

by Jim Stickford

Members of the Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce and the city government got together at the Palace of Auburn Hills on Jan. 24 to hear about the state of the community, and the news was good.

The main speaker was Auburn Hills Mayor James McDonald, but before he spoke, outgoing 2012 chairman of the chamber board of directors William Pilchak shared a few words.

He said it is always great to get together once a year and meet with people from government and business to talk about the state of the community.

"The year 2012 was a great year for the chamber thanks to the dynamic leadership of our executive director Denise Asker," Pilchak said.

The main speaker, Mayor McDonald, said giving a speech before the chamber was a pleasure because he got to do one of his favorite things - highlight projects and programs that have made a difference in Auburn Hills. McDonald said that the city is only 30 years old.

"Our reputation as a corporate powerhouse often overshadows our youth," McDonald said.

In the last three decades, McDonald said, the Palace opened in 1988, Chrysler world headquarters opened in 1991 and the Great Lakes Crossing shopping mall opened in 1998.

Part of what makes the city great, McDonald said, is that even though it has a large busi-

ness presence, it's been able to maintain a small town feel. In 2011 the city established a community foundation and last year it issued its first mini-grants.

And part of what makes a community great are the people who are so generous with their time, McDonald said. He pointed out that the city's Meals on Wheels program is a success due to the 10,000 hours worth of time put in by volunteer who delivered 10,000 meals to homebound seniors.

He said that city employees like Mikey Gorak, the recreation coordinator, who was named employee of the year in 2012 help keep the city running. He called her an enthusiastic professional and an outstanding representative for the city.

And McDonald said Auburn Hills works with businesses to provide them with what they need to operate.

"For the sixth year in a row, Auburn Hills has been recognized by U-M Dearborn for being a city that encourages and fosters entrepreneurial growth and economic development," McDonald said. "The study focuses on entrepreneurship because of its importance to the expansion and diversification of Michigan's regional economies and the impact small businesses have on job creation."

McDonald said small business owners like Sid Blomberg, owner and president of K&S Ventures Inc.; a mechanical and electrical contracting company, exemplifies the Auburn Hills entrepreneur. He started his company in 1990 with one employee, himself.

He now has 14 employees and he still has time to volunteer and get involved in the community. Blomberg is director of the Avondale Foundation.

"Sid is a great example of what a small business owner I have always envisioned would be," McDonald said, "hiring local people and being committed to the local community by volunteering their time and talents."

McDonald said the city considers its small businesses to be its customers. He cited the example of Gardner White. The company invested \$15 million into renovating a vacant industrial building to create a new regional distribution center on North Atlantic Blvd. The company wanted to dedicate about 5 percent of that space to retail sales, but local zoning didn't allow that.

"We looked at the big picture and weighed the pros and cons of allowing 5 percent of the building to be dedicated to retail use," McDonald said.

The city decided that 5 percent was such a small portion of the building that it could be considered an accessory rather than a retail use and allowed Gardner White to dedicate that space to retail sales. The public review process and city council approval occurred in just 42 days, McDonald said.

Quick approval doesn't mean the city cuts corners, McDonald said. They understand time is money and will go the extra mile when faced with challenges.

By helping businesses do business in the city, Auburn Hills saw \$35 million in improvements made to existing buildings and more than 450 new jobs created in the past year.

The city has a five-year spending plan in place and is working on the social aspects as well. McDonald said the Downtown Farmers Market continues to grow and that the Downtown Summerfest saw more than 6,000 people attend last year. The Fall Festival



Mayor Jim McDonald

in the Woods was also successful. The year was capped off with the 19th annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony downtown.

"This year promises to be a year of progress and innovation," McDonald said. "As we continue forward in 2013, there will be, no doubt, challenges, but we will maintain our focus - making Auburn Hills a great place to work, play and spend leisure time."

FIRST Teams Offered Grants From Chrysler Foundation

Note: This is the first in a series that will focus on the local schools that received grants for their robotics team.

Gentlemen - and ladies: Start your robots!

The 2013 FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) robotics season officially started Jan. 5 and the Chrysler Foundation is offering grants totaling \$147,000 to 25 elementary, middle and high school teams in Michigan.

Schools in three other states: Alabama, Arizona and Indiana; as well as in Ontario, Canada, were also grant recipients.

These grants will help teams offset costs of participating in the competition such as registration fees, parts and materials and team apparel.

The Chrysler Foundation will also give away \$29,000 in additional funds to boost the championship runs of those teams who qualify to compete at the FIRST Championship, slated for April 24-27, in St. Louis, Mo.

Last year, nine teams received additional funds. This year, the foundation has committed \$181,000 to FIRST teams and programs.

"The FIRST program is an ideal platform for inspiring the next generation of science and technology leaders that are vital to our industry, as well as many others," said Mark Chernoby, head of Vehicle Engineering and vice president - Executive Coordinator, Chrysler Group LLC.

"We hope that by engaging students at an early age, we can provide the spark that inspires them

to become tomorrow's engineers."

Chrysler Foundation has awarded \$6,400 grants to schools and teams, include these local ones:

Andover & Lahser High Schools (Bloomfield Hills); Birmingham Seaholm & Birmingham Groves High Schools; Bishop Foley Catholic High School (Madison Heights); Lake Orion High School; Macomb Academy of Arts and Sciences (Armada); Notre Dame Preparatory (Auburn Hills); Oakland Tech Northeast (Pontiac); OSM Tech Academy at Clarkston High School; Oxford Community Schools; Pontiac High School; Rochester Adams and Stoney Creek High Schools (Rochester Hills); Walled Lake Schools; and Warren Consolidated Schools

The Chrysler Foundation also awarded a \$5,000 grant to the "FIRST in Michigan" program to support district and statewide robotics competitions.

"The Chrysler Foundation and Chrysler Group are proud to help students discover the rewards and excitement of education and careers in science, engineering, and technology," said Jody Trappasso, senior vice president - External Affairs, Chrysler Group LLC and president - The Chrysler Foundation.

"We are equally proud of our employees who generously mentor students and serve as competition coordinators."

FIRST was founded in 1989 with a mission to inspire an appreciation of science and technology in young people.

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