



BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS BANQUET

granbury CHAMBER

The Granbury Chamber of Commerce's annual Best of Business Awards Banquet is a time for reflections on the accomplishments of the past year, but also an opportunity to gaze ahead into the new year. It's a chance to say 'thank you' to our previous board chair, Dr. Jeremy Glenn, Superintendent of Granbury Independent School District, as well as set the course for new leadership with incoming chair, Steven Kuban. Throughout 2023, Dr. Glenn has provided exceptional leadership and vision while guiding the chamber through new programming, annual special events and ongoing luncheons, breakfasts and business development seminars. His commitment to the chamber and community has been nothing short of amazing, and the banquet is our way of thanking him for his tireless efforts.

Steven Kuban takes the helm at a time when the chamber has worked very hard to preplan and anticipate growth opportunities. The chamber's annual 4th of July festivities will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2024 and plans are already underway to make this year a special salute... as only Granbury can! The chamber's committee chairs from Amba-



Brian Bondy, IOM
President and CEO
Granbury Chamber of Commerce

sadors and Women in Business to Rising Leaders and Best of Business Awards Banquet are ready to provide leadership, energy, enthusiasm and direction for the coming year.

At its annual board planning session in October, the board identified and agreed to champion several goals for the coming year. These represent areas from operations to marketing and are designed to engage the board and membership of the chamber. All are set up to constantly be updated throughout the coming year. From studying the impact of providing employee benefits and creating a testimonial campaign to promote chamber membership, to studying the long-term office needs for the chamber and focusing on membership retention and growth, the board has taken a huge step to elevate the cham-

ber... not only here in Granbury and Hood County, but also across the DFW Metroplex.

The Granbury Chamber of Commerce continues to refine and improve member benefits and services. Together with several assisting vendors, the chamber's advertising opportunities for members continue to expand whether on the website, Area Guide, or annual map of Granbury and Hood County. Member businesses and organizations have a wide array of options to help their businesses grow and get better.

Finally, the chamber has an excellent, professional staff that is committed to providing the best member and 'not yet member' services. Brian, Holly, Maegan and Tisa are as much a part of the community as our board and committee members. If you've never been a member of your local chamber of commerce, now is a great time to invest in yourself and your business. If you've previously been a member, maybe now is the time to give us another opportunity. Thank you to all of our current members for your membership and support of the chamber... it's going to be a great year!

The Granbury Chamber of Commerce Leading through serving local businesses and the community

BY EDEN DUNCAN GILBREATH
Special to the Hood County News
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The chamber of commerce can trace its history back to 1599 when the first organization of businesses was recorded. Originally the idea was to join forces for businesses to protect themselves from marauders and common enemies.

Spreading across Germany and the rest of Europe, the chamber as an organized group was more fully realized in the United States.

In the United States, the oldest chamber is the New York State Chamber formed in 1768 and chartered by King George III in 1770, making the chamber on this continent older than the nation itself.

Since its birth in 1952 the Granbury Chamber of Commerce has grown to boast over 2,000 members and is one of the most robust chambers within the larger Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex.

The Granbury Chamber of Commerce is committed to the strength of Granbury business and healthy growth for the area. Through partnerships with the city of Granbury and various Hood County groups the Granbury Chamber of Commerce works actively to improve the economic welfare of the community.

Community pride is increased through chamber involvement in local programs, charities, and education. Granbury's Hometown 4th of July Festival is a prime example of this. The chamber-sponsored event has become one of the best known in the state of Texas for Independence Day festivities. Not only are the 4th of July festivities important to build community but they naturally benefit businesses in Hood County with added revenue.

Chamber membership aids businesses in many tangible ways. First is the network of people who have similar goals and concerns. Membership allows businesses to partner with one another to increase engagement with citizens concerning all matters of commerce.

Granbury chamber events number over 50 a year. At the most popular member event — Coffee and Connections — members fraternize with others in a relaxed atmosphere over a cup of coffee, trading tips and business cards as they visit.

The Women in Business events are well-attended functions where women leaders give presentations to local businesswomen on subjects like increased sales, developing new marketing strategies and learning new ways of personal development as they network and support other women in business.

Business development events vary in topics as both local and regional experts bring educational opportunities to business leaders in every field. The Young Professionals Program specifically endeavors to meet the needs of those under age 30, with monthly events for this purpose.

Leaders in government luncheons and candidate forums allow members time to connect with leaders and elected officials at the city, county, state and national level.

Ribbon cutting events not only celebrate membership in the chamber, but serve as an announcement to the community as well as another chance for businesses to support one another.

Often citizens — when looking for reputable companies — will trust the recommendation of the chamber. Only chamber members are included in the print and online directories; this benefits members with referrals both by the chamber and by other chamber businesses as well.

Annually, members celebrate another successful year with the Awards Gala, where awards are given for the Small Business of the Year and the Large Business of the Year, in addition to the Women in Business award, the Rising Leader award, the Ambassador of the Year award and the Howard Clemmons Distinguished Service award.

The Granbury Chamber of Commerce looks forward to continued growth both in terms of membership and involvement in the community.

"The Granbury Chamber continues to be a dynamic, member-centric organization, and our program work for 2024 approved by the board of directors will bear this out!" said Brian Bondy, president and CEO of the Granbury Chamber of Commerce.

For information on how to join the Granbury Chamber of Commerce call 817-573-1622 or email info@granburychamber.com. Or visit the chamber offices at 3408 E. U.S. Hwy. 377, Granbury.



PHOTOS BY MARY VINSON | HOOD COUNTY NEWS

Ribbon cutting events not only celebrate membership in the chamber, but serve as an announcement to the community as well as another chance for businesses to support one another. The Granbury Regional Airport (above) and Radiance Wellness Medi-Spa (below) celebrated ribbon cuttings in 2023.



AMBASSADOR OF THE YEAR

Stan Wasielewski named Ambassador of the Year a second time

'It's the highest honor an ambassador can hope to achieve'

EMILY NAVA
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The Granbury Chamber of Commerce named Stan Wasielewski the Ambassador of the Year for 2023. Wasielewski has made a tremendous impact on the community and has been an integral part.

It was Wasielewski and his wife's dream to open a bed and breakfast, and in 2009 the dream came to life after the couple bought Granbury Gardens Bed and Breakfast located on Doyle Street. The couple owned the property for six years before selling it.

Wasielewski then became employed by Watterview Community as a chauffeur and is still with them today as a representative. He also served as a member of the Historic Preservation Commission for 12 years.

He later served as the vice president of the Ambassadors program through the Granbury Chamber before serving as chairman for a year.

In 2014, Wasielewski was named Ambassador of the Year, which came as a surprise to him.

"I was honored to have been chosen and I was really surprised because I wasn't highly involved in the chamber," Wasielewski said.

For ambassadors, the goal is to help local businesses and support them through their growth by holding monthly meetings, attending ribbon cuttings and being there to answer business-related questions.

"Last year I was even more honored to receive the Howard Clemmons Person of the

Year Award. That came out of nowhere," Wasielewski expressed.

He said he is passionate about small businesses and has loved the opportunity of meeting new people while serving the community. He noted that being named the Ambassador of the Year back in 2014 and now again for 2023, is "the highest honor an ambassador can receive."

"I have never been prouder to be an ambassador for the city of Granbury," he said. "When you realize our chamber is the fourth largest in North Texas, that just shows the magnitude of participation by the community, the businesses and ambassadors."

He added that his favorite aspects of the community are the people and the spirit. He added it is just plain fun to be in this town.

"We just feel so passionate about Granbury. We have lived 52 different places in our 56 years of married life," Wasielewski said. "Granbury is where home really is. When you are proud of your community and you are grateful to be able to live in it, then there is a responsibility to try and pay it back. What an honor it is to be able to be part of this community."

Wasielewski plans to continue to serve as an ambassador for as long as he can and looks forward to continuing to make an impact.

For those interested in becoming an ambassador with the Granbury Chamber of Commerce, an application is required and is available on the chamber's website at granburychamber.com.



Stan Wasielewski
Ambassador of the Year
Granbury Gardens Bed and Breakfast

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SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Randy's restaurants named 'Small Business of the Year'



Randy's Shrimp and Oyster Bar and Randy's Bar & Grill
Small Business of the Year
Randy Crawford, owner

EMILY NAVA | HOOD COUNTY NEWS

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Randy Crawford, owner of Randy's Bar and Grill and Randy's Shrimp and Oyster Bar, was named Small Business of the Year by the Granbury Chamber of Commerce.

Crawford previously owned Joe's Pasta and Pizza and ran the Italian restaurant for 10 years before deciding to make a change and opened Randy's Shrimp and Oyster Bar.

The remarkable strides Crawford made to reach this success did not come on a whim but started at the age of 15. Crawford started off his career in the restaurant industry working at Chili's. He worked there throughout high school and pursued restaurant and hotel management at Texas Tech University. All in all, he worked at 10 different Chili's locations over 14 years.

"Before I was able to graduate college, I was working at Chili's in Lubbock and had just gotten married and they offered me a position in management. At the time it was a lot of money, so I decided to not finish college and start my career in the restaurant world," Crawford said.

Crawford and his wife of 34 years, Elizabeth, lived in Highland Village before making the move to Granbury. He had made a down payment on a restaurant in downtown McKinney when his real estate agent urged him to look around Granbury before signing the deal. While taking a look at Joe's Pasta and Pizza, he fell in love with the town and the restaurant.

"I rolled in, had lunch, really loved the staff and the food was fantastic. I called my wife and told her I was going to stay the night to check out the town. I had lunch and dinner that next day and went around town and spent some time at a couple of businesses and restaurants in town. I called my wife and told her 'You need to come down and spend a couple of days out here.' Four days later we bought the restaurant," Crawford said.

With so many years in the restaurant industry, Crawford has been all over the country and lived in many different places, but he says nothing compares to Granbury.

"Granbury is probably the easiest town just to connect with people. They just embrace you and make you feel welcome," he said.

He shared about a time after he bought Joe's when a couple of guests — Lance Terry and Jim Ducato — called Crawford and told him they were coming to pick him up to show him around the town.

He was told about Leadership Granbury, and met with Diane Hedges, who was leading the

next class, before he signed up. He now says that was the best thing he did.

"If you are moving here or especially if you are starting a business in Granbury, you need to take the class," Crawford noted. "They will show you everything you need to know to learn how to embrace Granbury."

Crawford has loved the many interactions and relationships he has been able to build within the restaurant industry with both customers and his staff.

"I've been really fortunate. You know I kind of grew up in the golden age of restaurants," Crawford said. Crawford named many people he was able to spend a little time with including Larry Levine, Norman Brinker, Stan Fletcher, Norman Abdallah, Creed Ford and Kent Taylor — all icons in the restaurant industry.

"The blessing for me is having the ability to work not only with all these people but able to see and learn from them on how to be successful in this industry. I have made many mistakes along the way, but I have also learned a ton and these experiences are what has helped me get to where I am today," Crawford said.

The lessons he learned from those mentors are funneled into his teaching and helping his co-workers today.

"I've got a good circle of people that if any of us have a problem we can call each other whether it's an HR issue, a profitability issue, a food quality issue, I can call them and walk through my thoughts and they take the time to coach me or just plain tell me I am being stupid at times and help me stay focused," Crawford said. "(My staff) does a really good job helping me out and I'm part of their circle. Everybody helps each other."

Crawford stresses the importance of patience and being a good coach in the restaurant industry.

"You've got to take the time to coach and teach (your team) and spend the time with them. They're going to screw up. You have to give them a chance to figure out how to win."

With the success of both of his restaurants, the Granbury Chamber of Commerce announced Randy's as the Small Business of the Year.

Brian Bondy called Crawford's wife, who had previously served in the chamber, and told her the news of the award.

"She didn't realize he said we had won. She thought he just said we were nominated, so my wife is like 'Oh, that's great' and then I go 'I was kind of listening and it sounded like he said we won'," Crawford said. "We called him back and then we officially learned we won. I was very grateful. You don't expect something

like this, but it is definitely an honor and so it's nice to be recognized, but it's really for my team."

Crawford is currently in the works of opening another restaurant by the name of Vito's Italian Kitchen (remodeling the old Mi Familia building). He hopes to have the restaurant open at the beginning of April. He said the only way he would have even thought about opening up a third restaurant was if he could partner up with someone that shares his focus on developing a team while also serving "killer food."

This led to the hiring of Richard Williams, who has joined the team as a partner in all concepts as well as operating as director of operations. Crawford has worked with Wil-

liams in some capacity for over 30 years.

Crawford credited the success of both restaurants to his leadership team including, "Lauri, Brooklyn, Ben, Rodrigo, Courtney and of course our amazing staff at both locations," he said. "Once we get Vito's up and running and can prove it can make money, we'll have three proven concepts. Once that is done, then the plan is to start looking into Stephenville, Cleburne or Weatherford to see what type of venue the town needs and really find a niche in these smaller markets. It's about finding the right location and building a great team."

Randy's Bar and Grill is located at 1454 E. U.S. Highway 377 and Randy's Shrimp and Oyster Bar is located at 1300 S. Morgan St.

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LARGE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Henson Lumber: Providing decades of quality building materials since 1973

BY ASHLEY TERRY
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Henson Lumber is no stranger to Hood County.

The building material enterprise located in Cresson has provided decades of service to commercial builders and do-it-yourself enthusiasts since it was established in 1973 by previous owner and founder Jerry Henson.

But after more than 50 years, Henson Lumber is officially being recognized in the most honorable way by the Granbury Chamber of Commerce as the company received the Large Business of the Year Award during the chamber banquet on Jan. 25.

Originally, the enterprise was known as Henson Lake and Ranch Supply, but later came to be known as Henson Building Materials. In the early 2000s, the company split into two divisions: Henson Metal and Henson Lumber.

"There was a single location on (U.S.) Highway 377 where Henson Building Materials is currently. We relocated to 11900 CR 917 in Cresson before Mr. Henson passed," said Casey Wallace, chief operating officer of Henson Lumber. "It was just a great situation for us and it's a bigger location with rail that comes in the yard."

Henson Enterprises — which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2022 — services the counties of Hood, Johnson, Parker and Tarrant, and operates under the three divisions of lumber, metal and millwork. Henson Lumber and Henson Millwork are both located at 11900 County Road 917 while Henson Metal can be found at 9200 E. U.S. Highway 377.

"We kind of have three different departments and that's not counting the building materials on the highway," Wallace said. "Here in our location, we have a lumber division, we have a millwork — which we build door units out back — and then we have a reload.

All three of those businesses are in our location here."

The Henson brand also owns 80 acres of land at its Henson Lumber location with Wallace adding that the company doesn't utilize all 80, but that they have plenty of room to grow — which they have.

Since Wallace joined Henson Lumber almost 40 years ago, he has witnessed the company expand exponentially — starting with only 20 employees around the 1990s to now employing more than 80.

One reason the Henson brand continues to grow, Wallace said, is through its loyal employees.

"We have a lot of seasoned employees here," said Todd Garner, executive vice president of Henson Enterprises. "I remember one time I did an analysis of how much tenure our average employee had, and our average tenure is over 10 years of employment at Henson's across the board. That just speaks to how we take care of people. People want to stay here a long time and we want to be a place where people can work, have fun and retire eventually someday."

Wallace explained that the company provides a food truck every quarter for its employees and added that the benefit package is "comparable, if not better, than some bigger companies."

"Just having a family atmosphere is our thing and that's the reason we're able to have many long-tenured employees," he said. "We try to take care of our employees and our customers alike because in today's world, it's hard to get good employees, so we try our best to retain them and do good things for them."

"I think the important part is that it's like an extension of our family," Garner added. "We take care of our employees, and we take care of our customers."

Wallace said the company also hangs a plaque on the wall to recognize employees as they hit yearly milestones in working within Henson Enterprises.



Henson Lumber
Large Business of the Year
Todd Garner, Executive Vice President

MARY VINSON | HOOD COUNTY NEWS

"The names on the plaque keeps growing," he said. "We have a lot of long-tenured employees on that plaque."

Henson Lumber is still reeling from its most recent accomplishment of acquiring Decatur Lumber, a respected family-owned lumberyard based in Decatur.

"(Decatur Lumber) is a company very similar to ours, so it's fun for us to acquire a company that we're working with to expand our market inside the Fort Worth area," he said.

While the Henson brand continues to foster its own growth, the brand's employees have also immersed themselves in many community activities as they work to shape and develop Hood County.

Over the past decade, Henson's has been a steadfast supporter of numerous school-related activities, ranging from sports and arts to special events. Notable contributions include support for the Pirate Football Booster Club, basketball booster clubs, the Granbury High School swim team, GHS cheerleaders, Atlas Racing (F1 cars), FCCLA, Project Graduation, GHS Pirate color guard, GHS band and many others.

Henson's commitment also extends beyond monetary donations, as evidenced by the donation of the metal fence around the gates at Pirate Stadium and consistent support for the Hood County Junior Livestock Show.

However, the company's community involvement is not limited to educational initiatives, as Henson managers, directors and employees actively participate in a plethora of community groups, like Christmas for Children, the Lake Granbury Water Coalition, Meals on Wheels, and foot and bike races in Granbury (Granbury Road Race, Acton Nature Center 5K, and Blazin' Saddles Bike Race).

Beyond the past decade, Henson's has also consistently contributed to various community organizations, such as Granbury Seals, Granbury Soccer Association, Friends of Memorial Lane and Rotary Club.

"The breadth of our community involvement speaks to the very essence of Henson DNA — a commitment to giving back and fostering a vibrant, supportive community," Garner said.

As Henson Lumber accepts the award of Best Large Business of the Year from Granbury Chamber of Commerce, both Garner and Wallace are looking ahead to the future of the Henson brand.

"There's a lot of big companies in Hood County, and I think we're very grateful — but I think it also represents the things that our people do for the community," Garner said. "It's exciting that we've hit that 50-year milestone, but we're looking forward to quite a few more."

Henson Lumber

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HOWARD CLEMMONS DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

James Brock — the answer is always love



James Brock
Howard Clemmons Distinguished Service Award
Brock's Food and Drink

BY EDEN DUNCAN GILBREATH
Special to the Hood County News
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COVID-19 lockdowns didn't seem the most prudent time to open a new business. At least James Brock didn't think it was — but he did so anyway.

Brock and his wife Jan are business partners who moved here from North Richland Hills in 2000 to be closer to family. When their two children were young the family went to Santa Fe, New Mexico, each summer where Brock took cooking lessons while the children played all day.

Brock spent his early working years running a furniture manufacturing company with his dad and brother. Later, he worked in the construction and pipeline industry. But his dream was always to open a restaurant.

Boredom set in during the lockdowns, and Brock decided to make this lifelong dream a reality. The restaurant bears the family name, and no one is more surprised at the level of its success than the Brock family.

The vision was of a place where Brock could share his culinary skills and

where musicians and vocalists could share their talents as well. The reality of Brock's Food and Drink is all that and more. In just a few short years Brock's has become a famous local hang-out where good tunes and good times go with good grub.

No one can claim success for the establishment more than Brock himself. His gregarious nature and quick wit enlivens the place. Employees and patrons alike sing his praises. But Brock isn't arrogant concerning his success — he's grateful.

"I have just been very, very blessed," he said.

Brock's Food and Drink gives away over 1,000 meals at Thanksgiving alone, in addition to giving away free food throughout the year. When the summer food program for school-aged children was not operating, Brock himself got up at 4 a.m. in the summer to cook eggs to provide free breakfast.

"I hate eggs," he said with a laugh.

Serving the community is a core value of Brock and his establishment, "Two things about what we do. We don't do it for recognition, we do it because it's the right thing to do. These are our friends and neighbors. We do our best to project love and kindness," he shared.

PHOTOS BY MARY VINSON | HOOD COUNTY NEWS

Brock cracks one joke after another. He insists he is the last person the chamber of commerce should give an award to.

"I think they made a horrible mistake. I don't know about me. I opened a new business during 2020. And then I give food away for free every week. That doesn't sound like a very good businessperson to me," he added.

He jests further, "If they want the award back, I won't cause a fuss, there will be no problems, no fuss at all. They made a horrendous mistake; they will want it back. I know it's coming. I won't even buy a sports coat. Rent, I will rent one."

Brock insists they sent someone out personally to tell him of his award so they could make sure he understood attending the event meant shunning his customary shorts in favor of pants.

But then Brock gets serious, "Really, do tell them that I am greatly honored that they selected me."

Brock has some words of wisdom to go with his wit, "I am getting old and sick and sometimes I forget the question," he chides with a twinge of truth, "but I always know the answer and the answer is always love."



RISING STAR AWARD

Empire Realty Group named Rising Star
'An agency for agents'

BY EMILY NAVA
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Empire Realty Group is a real estate agency in Granbury that opened its doors in March 2022 and has already made a name for itself by earning the "Rising Star" award from the Granbury Chamber of Commerce.

Kevin Watson, owner and broker of the agency, worked as a title examiner in the title insurance industry for 23 years. Watson works alongside his wife Kara, who previously worked in the mortgage lending industry. The two are Granbury High School sweethearts and are now coming up on their 34th anniversary.

Watson, a Tarleton State University alum, decided to obtain his broker's license in 2021 after talking with Kara. Watson told the HCN the hardest part of opening the agency was coming up with the name. One day when Watson was driving, the word "empire" popped into his head. An avid Star Wars fan, he felt the connection to the Star Wars franchise seemed like a perfect fit and thus

the the Empire Realty Group was born.

The brokerage currently has seven real estate agents, including Watson and Kara, with a wide range of experience and clientele. Kara was the most recent agent to come on board after she obtained her license in June. The agency covers residential, commercial and land listings.

"What makes us different from most other brokerages in town is that they have a brick-and-mortar office. What made it easy for me was that we decided to do a virtual brokerage," Watson said. "We do all our work from home. It gives us all that freedom while saving costs on renting a space."

Watson describes his agency as "an agency for agents" because of the family-like mentality and relationships among the agents. One agent in the office, Crystal Wilson, is even a broker herself but has loved getting to work alongside Watson and being that second opinion.

"I like having someone to be able to connect with and say, 'hey this is what I'm thinking, are we going down the right path?'" Wilson said. "I think that as real estate agents, we are subject to a lot of scrutiny and it's good to have someone you can bounce feedback off of to make sure that we are on the right path."

Watson likes the tightknit group they have and wants it to remain similar in size to keep those close bonds and relationships.

"I want to be there to help agents to do their job, but at the same time I want to give



Empire Realty Group
Rising Star Award
Kevin Watson, Owner/Broker

PHOTOS BY EMILY NAVA | HOOD COUNTY NEWS

them the freedom to do their marketing how they see fit, but still not have that interoffice competition," Watson said. "We help each other out. We're a family, absolutely."

Watson notes his success comes from his knowledge of the town of Granbury. He added that the growth of the town is something the agency continues to monitor and stay on top of.

"I think from a real estate standpoint, it's exciting to be part of a town that's growing," real estate agent Erienne Higgins said.

When it comes to working with clients, the agency focuses on prioritizing each client's needs and working around what is best for them.

"Our goal is to make sure the clients are served to the best of our ability," Watson

said. "Whenever people work within our agency, I want them to leave with a good feeling."

Watson described the agency being named as "Rising Star" as an honor and thanked the Granbury Chamber of Commerce.

"We really appreciate everybody that nominated us and voted for us, and we're very excited for what is to come," Watson expressed.

To learn more about Empire Realty Group visit its website at empirerealtytexas.com, call 254-396-5056 or shoot them an email at info@EmpireRealtyTexas.com.





Henson Lumber
Large Business of the Year
 Todd Garner, Executive Vice President

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James Brock
Howard Clemmons Distinguished Service
 Brock's Food and Drink



C.J. Prater
Rising Leader of Granbury
 Harbor Lakes Nursing and Rehabilitation



Randy's Shrimp and Oyster Bar and Randy's Bar & Grill
Small Business of the Year
 Randy Crawford, owner



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Rising Star Award
 Kevin Watson, Owner/Broker



Tracie Harper
Women in Business Award
 Daffan Cooling & Heating



Stan Wasielewski
Ambassador of the Year
 Granbury Gardens Bed and Breakfast

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Tracie Harper: Living a life of purpose at Daffan

BY ASHLEY TERRY
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Never in a million years did Tracie Harper believe she would find herself in a sales career at Daffan Cooling and Heating.

In fact, she was just as surprised to learn she'd won the Granbury Chamber of Commerce's Women in Business Award Jan. 25.

But 15 years later, that one job has filled her life with purpose — allowing her to form lasting bonds and connections with many Hood County residents.

Harper, who grew up in Watauga, married her high school sweetheart, Ty, and gave birth to two sons — Nic and Dillon — before making the move to Granbury in 1995.

"We didn't know a single soul when we moved here," she said. "We just knew (Ty) needed to be close enough to commute to Fort Worth. We looked at little towns all around Fort Worth and we just said, 'We love Granbury,' and 'We love that house.' We took a leap of faith and made the move, and it was the best thing we ever did."

After residing in Granbury for a few years, Harper said she knew she needed to go back to work as she has always been "career-minded," so she decided to start volunteering at the Granbury Chamber of Commerce — a move that eventually led to a full-time job.

From there, Harper had a few jobs selling radio advertising and it was then she learned a career in sales was the right move for her future.

"I found that sales was what I was born to do and my passion," she said. "I absolutely love sales."

But it wasn't until she was approached by the owners of Daffan Cooling and Heating in 2008 when she truly found her calling.

"They told me they had gotten to the point where they really needed to find a full-time salesperson," Harper told the HCN. "I was like 'I don't know anything about air conditioning. You fix it when I tell you to come and fix it, but I don't even know where my filter goes.'"

However, after a little convincing, Harper came on board with Daffan when she was 45 years old. She said she recalls studying harder than she had in years — even harder than her son, Dillon, who was in his senior year in high school at the time.

"I just studied all the technical standpoints of, 'How does the air conditioner work?' 'What are all of the parts?' and 'What does the heater do?' I'd have books, charts and graphs all over the place," she said. "But I started as a full-time salesperson there and just fell in love with it."

She explained she doesn't like the technical parts of her job, but she likes the relationship aspect where she gets to connect with her customers.

"What I love about it is, now, this many years later, we have a very large coverage area and I deal with all kinds of people in all kinds of different stages of their life: economic situations, family situations — and I just love trying to help them find a solution that they're comfortable with for a purchase that they aren't really that excited to make," she said. "It's very rewarding when they hug

you and say, 'Thank you, Tracy.'"

An experience with one customer stands out to her vividly, during which the customer's husband was on hospice and she confided in Harper about their current situation.

"As a woman in the heating and air conditioning business, I've found that people are sometimes comforted by that," she explained. "HVAC is not a ministry, but I've had an opportunity to pray with customers, cry with customers — people that just recently become a widow and they're overcome by this idea and so afraid somebody is going to take advantage of them that they just break down crying and saying, 'I don't know what to do. He always took care of this.'"

Currently Harper is in her fifth year as sales manager at Daffan, but explained she still meets with customers as it's her favorite part of the job.

"I know it sounds like a very blue-collar technical job but to me it's not; it's a relationship job, and it's a people job," she said. "I just happen to provide heating and air conditioning (service)."

While Harper's main duty is to manage two "outstanding" sales assistants, she said she still has the freedom to work out in the field.

"I have the opportunity to try to grow the sales department for Daffan and try to leave a legacy of caring, relationship-building and integrity that we're known for," Harper said.

Not only does Harper keep busy on the sales end of things, she also serves as a speaker and coach for other individuals employed in the HVAC business.

"I love working with people and trying to add value to their life and trying to mentor them and learn," she said. "At this stage of my life, it's real fun and important to me to pour into the next generation that's behind me."

She added that her personal mission statement is to be "intentional about living a life of purpose, loving people and leaving a legacy of influence."

"I want to be purposeful; I want to love people in everything I do — whether it's work, volunteer, family friends or ministry — I would like to think I left some positive influence in someone's life," Harper said.

Although she stressed that she has no plans to leave Daffan anytime soon, her future goals involve more coaching, speaking and training, as she loves educating the younger generation.

"I just love helping people in sales or leadership because I think there's lots of opportunity in today's culture for people to step up, be exceptional and take a leadership stance," Harper said. "But I will tell you what. Whatever I do (in the future), I'm open to challenges and opportunities."

While Harper was shocked with her recent chamber award, she said she is humbled and honored to have worked with other exceptional women in the community.

"There's multiple women in this town that really inspired me to make an impact and how to be successful in doing that," she added. "So, I'm just humbled, grateful and honored (to accept the award). I love living here and I love serving the community."



TRACIE HARPER 2024 WOMEN IN BUSINESS AWARD

We'd like to think Tracie is our secret weapon at Daffan. She strives to encourage, mentor and train our team members whether they are in her department or not.

She brought this same deeply held desire for helping others to the Granbury Chamber of Commerce's Women in Business Group. We couldn't be more proud of her for this highly deserved recognition.

Thank you for all you do for our team and our community!
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Tracie Harper
Women in Business Award
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RISING LEADER OF GRANBURY

C.J. Prater: Setting a precedent in community leadership

BY ASHLEY TERRY
Staff Writer
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C.J. Prater was only a nursing home administrator at Harbor Lakes Nursing and Rehabilitation for a short while, but he has already made his mark as a leader — not only as an employee, but in the community as well.

Prater was recently honored with the Rising Leader of Granbury Award from the Granbury Chamber of Commerce for being instrumental in growing leadership in Granbury, Hood County and the chamber itself.

"I was not expecting to win it," he told the HCN. "In all honesty, I can count about three or four people who were on that list that we were voting for who deserved it more than I did."

While modest, Prater has been known to attend several events around town for the chamber and he is also vice president and head of youth services for the Rotary Club of Granbury.

Originally from Grandview, Prater took a "scenic route through college," and attended three different colleges before ending up at Tarleton State University in Stephenville. He graduated in 2013 with a bachelor's degree in kinesiology.

Following graduation, Prater landed a job as an activity director at a nursing home and was later persuaded into taking more schooling to become an administrator — a role he was in from 2016 to 2023.

After he obtained his schooling, he took an open position as a starting administrator in Eastland, but his main goal was to land a job around the Hood County area to be closer to family.

"They finally came and headhunted

me for Trinity (Nursing and Rehabilitation of Granbury), which is just north of the square, so I was there for four years," Prater said. "And then this spot opened up (at Harbor Lakes) and I was like, 'You know what, if anything, I might as well move up to try to get bigger things,' and it worked out. They accepted me and I've been over here for the last year."

As a nursing home administrator, Prater was essentially the "CEO of the building." He oversaw finances and the hiring of all future job candidates.

Although Prater said he wasn't able to have many one-on-one conversations with the residents as an administrator, he loved getting any time he could spare with them.

"The people you deal with (is what I love the most)" he said. "My coworkers (were) probably some of the brightest things about the job."

While Prater said he wouldn't change anything about his experience at Harbor Lakes, his last day as a nursing home administrator was Wednesday, Jan. 24.

"I am going to go into financing through Edward Jones," he said. "It's a completely different career choice, but it's been something I've been working on since 2019. My brother has been an Edward Jones financial advisor for 10 years now and he's been slowly trying to get me into the spot. It was finally time because everything fell into place."

When he is not busy serving as a leader, Prater enjoys spending time with family and his 4-year-old daughter, Linlee.



C.J. Prater
Rising Leader of Granbury
Harbor Lakes Nursing and Rehabilitation

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