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Fort Atkinson's Scherer named 'Friend of Chamber'

By Christine Spangler cspangler@dailyunion.com 2 hrs ago



Chris Scherer of Red Square Audio, was presented the “Friend of the Chamber” Award when the Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce held its fall open house Tuesday at the Soulful Toad. He is pictured above with the chamber staff, from left to right: tourism manager Olivia Ault, Scherer, Executive Director Carrie Chisholm and project manager Kelley Westphal.

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An entrepreneur who has been the Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce’s soundman for the majority of its events was named Friend of the Chamber Tuesday evening.

Chris Scherer of Red Square Audio, was presented the honor during the organization’s fall open house at the Soulful Toad.

Chamber Executive Director Carrie Chisholm, project manager Kelley Westphal and tourism manager Olivia Ault alternated remarks in introducing Scherer as the award recipient.

“We begin with a tribute to a person who has been a true friend of the chamber for many years, which is remarkable, given his age,” Chisholm said. “He was the youngest member ever of the Fort Atkinson Chamber of Commerce, joining when he was just 15.”

Ault: “Yeah, while most of us were trying to pass our chemistry classes, he was contracting with the high school to provide entertainment for our homecoming dance.”

Chisholm: “Our recipient is home-grown in Fort Atkinson, and has a true desire to see his community grow and succeed. He is always available for whatever we need, like music for the runners as they crossed the finish line during the Fort Half Marathon.”

Westphal: “And for stage set-up at Rhythm on the River. Plus he brought a well-timed cup of coffee for me, which was much appreciated.”

Ault: “And he set up about \$4,000 worth of technology for our annual dinner at The Fireside (Dinner Theatre) so our guests could see everything and enjoy themselves, no matter where they were seated.”

Westphal: “And he has rescued many businesses over breakfasts or business after hours when we needed last-minute amplification.”

Chisholm: “We don’t have a nomination process for the Friend of the Chamber. The staff usually has a conversation about some people who have been exceptionally helpful, and then we choose to recognize one of them.”

Westphal announced that Scherer, the chamber’s “go-to sound and entertainment guru, was the name that materialized, because he is so involved in every event we plan.”

Ault added that Scherer also was the chamber’s top ambassador last year, bringing in several new members.

“He is one of our young professionals, a true entrepreneur who has started two businesses, and he is always the first to nominate another business for our Tourism Counts and Small Businessperson of the Year awards,” Chisholm said of Scherer. “He is a frequent and requested speaker for our high school

careers class lectures, and he currently serves Fort Atkinson as a member of the city's Planning Commission.

"While not a paid employee, Chris is very much a part of our team at the chamber, and we are very appreciative of his efforts to help us be the best we can be," she concluded.

Scherer, who joined the chamber when only 15, thanked the chamber for the award.

"Ten, 11 years ago when I joined the chamber, I don't think I would have ever expected to be at this point today," he said. "I'm glad that I was able to walk into my first Business After Hours, and everybody welcomed me in. And that was something that has led to me staying with the chamber all these years afterward. So thank you guys."

Meanwhile also Tuesday, Kelley Westphal, projects manager for the Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce, thanked three volunteers for their work with Rhythm on the River.

Westphal said the projects manager typically does not give out awards at the fall open house, but she "felt a little left out" and wanted to do things a bit differently this year.

The chamber, she said, is so thankful for all its committee members, without whose continuous support events would not be what they are today. One such event is Rhythm on the River, she said, noting that some committee members have been serving since the event began 16 years ago.

"I want to recognize three people that really stepped up and made this year one of the most successful Rhythm on the Rivers that we've ever had," Westphal remarked. "We're calling this the 'Jeff Award' because there are three Jeff's that have put a lot of work into this event for many years and we think they deserve some recognition."

They are Jeff Theder, Jeff Woods and Jeff Armstrong. Neither Woods nor Armstrong were able to attend Tuesday's chamber outing.

She called Theder to the podium.

"Jeff is a longstanding member of the committee and a huge supporter of Rhythm on the River," Westphal said. "Jeff brings in an entire crew from Jones Dairy Farm to help set up the bar and take down the event."

“Jeff knows Rhythm on the River probably better than anyone, and he and his guys did everything, no questions asked, even when we needed picnic tables moved at 6 o'clock on a Friday night,” she added. “He was also our ‘stage security’ this year. So thank you, Jeff, for your many years of dedication and hard work. You are truly appreciated.”

The project manager next recognized Jeff Woods.

“Many of you know Jeff – he is a former city engineer,” Westphal said. “Jeff has also been on the Rhythm on the River committee for multiple years and is a huge asset to the team. He graciously lets us use his truck to haul a trailer, and went back and forth to Madison to pick up extra lighting.

“If we lose the spotlight, Jeff is the one to fix it,” she added. “He and his wife always volunteer at the event, and help set up and take down. Thank you, Jeff, for being a great asset to the team. We enjoy having you on the committee.”

The third Jeff is not really a committee member, the projects manager said, but the chamber likes to think of him as an “honorary member” because he always is there to help.

“Jeff Armstrong, who is our city electrician, made it possible this year to move the stage to a new location,” Westphal said. “We had a small hiccup with some of the power for the food vendors during the event, and Jeff came right down to help with no questions asked.”

He also was instrumental in the success of the 2018 Project LEAD, Riverwalk Plaza.

“He contributed countless hours to that, and we thank you Jeff for your willingness to always work with whatever ideas we have,” Westphal said.

“Let’s give the Jeffs a round of applause!”

Coming to the podium, Theder thanked a few people who definitely played a role in his being honored Tuesday.

“The first one is Dean Brown because he’s the one who got me on the committee to begin with,” Theder said with a smile. “And it really wasn’t, ‘Would you?’ It was ‘Jeff, you’re going to.’ So I did.

“Dr. (James) Fitzpatrick (retired school district administrator) I'd like to thank,” he added. “He really showed me community involvement and what it's all about: leadership. So to him, hat's off. I've always appreciated that.”

Theder also thanked Dianne Hrobsky, retired Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce executive director, who “way back when had the insight and trust to put me on the board of directors.

“And I've always appreciated Carrie Chisholm and her staff,” he added. “They've always got your back and they always work hard, which is great.

“But, most importantly, all you guys (members),” Theder concluded.

“It's your support and your money that makes this thing go. I'm just a small cog, and we appreciate the good job. Keep it up.”

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