

OUR COMMUNITY. OUR BUSINESS.



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For Immediate Release:

Big Sky Chamber Black Diamond Award winners inspire us to get involved **Local standouts recognized during annual gathering at the newly opened Wilson Hotel**

BIG SKY, Montana (June 27, 2019)—The first business event at The Wilson Hotel held on Tuesday, June 26th spotlighted this year’s recipients of the 22nd Annual Black Diamond Business Awards, which honored those working hard to build Big Sky into a world-class resort destination and sustainable community.

In front of a sold-out crowd of 150, the Big Sky Chamber recognized a courageous entrepreneur, a devoted nonprofit leader, a role-model business leader, an outstanding business and a dedicated local with a long track-record of remarkable community involvement. The Chamber board also approved the FY20 budget and elected new board members to govern the organization for the upcoming year.

Emerging Entrepreneur: Kara and Ben Blodgett of The Rocks. “Having the bravery to turn your passion into a business and having the grit to work the long hours to make it a success is no small feat, but Big Sky thrives on a community full of businesses driven by passionate, hard-working entrepreneurs,” said Caitlin Quisenberry, programming and events manager at the Chamber. Quisenberry told the crowd gathered in the Sapphire Ballroom of the Residence Inn by Marriott, “This year’s winner has managed to keep their doors open and thriving through peak and shoulder seasons, greeting our locals and guests with charm and hospitality.”

Nonprofit Person of the Year: Ciara Wolfe, who has, “Put in countless hours to ensure the longevity of our community’s vitality and livability,” said Quisenberry. Thanks to Wolfe’s leadership of the Big Sky Community Organization, “Our lands and public spaces have been secured for true community use and access including years-long work to prepare to raise \$12 plus million to buy land and build a Community Center in the heart of town.”

Business Person of the Year: Tim Kent of First Security Bank has shown the determination and strength of character to push difficult projects across the finish line. “Big Sky has taken landmark strides in beginning to address our access to workforce housing,” said Quisenberry, describing Kent’s involvement with the MeadowView project.

Business of the Year: The Simkins Family and the Big Sky Town Center. “As a business membership organization, the Big Sky Chamber is honored to recognize the vast impact that businesses have on Big Sky’s growth and development,” said Quisenberry, describing how the Simkins family sold 3.3 acres of land in the heart of the Town Center to the Big Sky Community Organization dedicated to a future Community Center. The Simkins were also congratulated for the thoughtful design and significant investment in the new Town Center Plaza in front of The Wilson Hotel where Big Sky Comes Together.

Chet Huntley Lifetime Achievement Award: Philanthropist Loren Bough has dedicated himself to creating and supporting major building blocks in Big Sky. This includes his significant involvement in the Warren Miller Performing Arts Center, the creation of Lone Peak High School and the development of Big Sky Medical Center. Bough has served on numerous boards including the Big Sky Resort Tax Board, WMPAC, Friends of Big Sky Education, Yellowstone Club Community, and currently is in his third term as Chair of the Big Sky School District Board.

Kevin Germain, Big Sky Chamber Board Member, presented Bough with the award, and said, “I can think of no person more deserving of this award. Loren, and his wife Jill, are committed and dedicated community members. The Boughs have focused on making Big Sky a world-class community by focusing on education, the environment and the arts. He cares deeply about this community. His positive efforts to help build a community have been thoughtful, thorough and fair. Best of all, this year Loren coached the 7th & 8th girls basketball team to a 27-0 record!”

The keynote speaker for the Black Diamond Awards Dinner was Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Cam Sholly, who shared his top five strategic priorities for YNP. These include investing in infrastructure, focusing on the people who work at the park and how to deal with increased visitation. These mirror much of what Big Sky is focusing on as well. [For the Chamber specifically, telecommunications is its next key priority for 2019, having received \\$80,000 in resort tax funding to commission a study of current capacity and gaps in both cell and internet service \(click to see video\).](#)

“Highlighting the best of us and our business community was the perfect way to celebrate the landmark opening of The Wilson Hotel,” said Candace Carr Strauss, CEO of the Big Sky Chamber. “Those honored should inspire us all to roll up our sleeves and get involved with the continued build out of our community. Big Sky is a unique and special place, and it’s powered by passionate people who chose to live here and are willing to show up and get things done to make it better.”

Newly elected board members and those continuing their terms were also recognized for their service to the Big Sky Chamber and the community.

They include:

- Scott Johnson, Chair – At-large
- David O’Connor, Past Chair – Buck’s T-4
- Katie Grice – Vice Chair – Big Sky Resort
- Ken Lancey, Treasurer – Grizzly Outfitters
- Shannon Sears, Secretary – Montana Title & Escrow
- Frank Acito, Yellowstone Club
- Sarah Gaither, Big Sky Community Food Bank
- Kevin Germain, Lone Mountain Land Company
- Greg Lisk, Gallatin Riverhouse Grill
- Joel Nickel, Suffolk Construction
- Bill Simkins, Big Sky Town Center

Inspired to get involved? Start by filling out a “[Big Sky Opportunities Questionnaire](#).” It’s part of the “Our Big Sky” strategic visioning process now underway, thanks to support and leadership from the Big Sky Resort Area District.

About the Big Sky Chamber of Commerce

The Big Sky Chamber of Commerce is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit membership organization representing 450+ businesses from throughout Gallatin and Madison Counties, Montana and the U.S. Serving as the VOICE of Big Sky business, the Big Sky Chamber CHAMPIONS a healthy economy and works collaboratively with community stakeholders (CONVENES) as a CATALYST to improve the overall quality of life in the region. Elevate Big Sky 2023, the Big Sky Chamber’s Strategic Plan, highlights its focus on advocating for and working to create a positive business climate in the greater Gallatin Valley, encouraging community infrastructure investment and facilitating local governance for the Big Sky community. For more information visit www.bigskychamber.com

