

## Brannon's, Superspeedway get top awards

The Greater Talladega Area Chamber of Commerce honored local businesses and individuals in four categories Wednesday at the annual banquet at the Gilchrist room at Alabama School for the Deaf.

After brief welcoming remarks by 2008 Chamber Chief Volunteer Officer Valerie Burrage and an invocation from the Rev. James D. Hemphill, Sue Nicholls took the podium to present the Community Service Award.

The nominees were Cheaha Regional Head Start, George Culver, Garing's Business Machines, Brian Hutton, Jeanne Rasco, Laura Robbins, the American Red Cross and the Talladega Junior Welfare League.

The Junior Welfare League, of which Nicholls is a member, won the plaque. Founded in 1933 ("Contrary to popular belief, I was not a charter member," Nicholls quipped), the club was patterned on the Mobile Junior League, but could not be chartered as a Junior League because Talladega was not big enough. Nicholls' mother, aunt and cousin were all charter members, however, and she said she grew up around "League talk."

League members were also sometimes referred to as "Milk Maids," because of an early program providing milk for needy school children, and the Junior Welfare League, "hopefully because they made cakes for the soldiers at Fort McClellan when they came down here, rolled miles of bandages and made hospital gowns during World War II," Nicholls said. "But it might also be because when you get 14 women together like they did that first year, you'll have to agree to disagree sometimes."



The league also provided sandwiches and milk for patients at the Crippled Children's Clinic, and ran a kindergarten class before the public schools here did. The kindergarten was funded through the annual children's follies, she said.

The group also donated a delivery table and an oxygen tent, which Nicholls said directly benefited her asthmatic son, to Citizens Baptist Medical Center.

Currently, the league sold 429 cases of apples this year benefiting local schools, conducts bingo games at Talladega Health Care, rented two booths at Sunshine Saturday and donated \$30,000 worth of state-of-the-art playground equipment to Jemison Park.

The remaining awards were presented by Jason Hurst, this year's First Volunteer Officer.

The nominees for Outstanding Chamber Member were ATAP, Mary Jane

Kiker, Kristi King, the Junior Welfare League and the Talladega Superspeedway.

In what may have been an unprecedented event, Hurst said, the votes came out to a tie between King and Kiker.

King is immediate past president of the chamber board and the public relations manager for the speedway - and by extension "our city, county and state," Hurst said. She is also an active member of the Talladega Kiwanis Club and numerous other service organizations.

Kiker opened the city's first temporary staffing agency, and is currently area manager for Elwood Staffing. She also worked at one time for former mayor Dr. James Hardwick. She has worked with the Talladega College Foundation, chaired the Walkathon Committee from 1998 to 1999, was involved with the Saturday on the Square events and has worked closely with the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind.

For the Small Business of the Year, meaning those with fewer than 100 employees, the nominees were Battle Street Deli, Brannon's Office Supply, Cafe Royale, Quality Supply Inc., Elwood Staffing and First National Bank of Talladega.

The award went to Brannon's Office Supply, which was established in 1886 as a print shop. After changing hands just after World War I and again in the early 1950s, the retail office supply business was added.

Cleve and Cathe Jacobs took over the business from Cathe's parents in the 1970s, and have run it since.

"The measure of a business' success is its service to its customers and its employees in the community," Hurst said. Brannon's employees are involved in organizations including the March of Dimes, the American Heart Association, the American Red Cross and

many others, and they support "educational, civic and economic development," according to Hurst.

Brannon's also has been nominated for a Centennial Retail Award.

The large Business of the Year Award contenders included Cheaha Regional Head Start, MasterBrand Cabinets, Talladega Healthcare Center, Talladega Machinery and Supply and the Talladega Superspeedway.

The speedway won by being "bigger, faster and more competitive" than any other track in the country.

The track gives \$500,000 per year back to community organizations, and track employees are heavily involved in numerous civic organizations. They also draw thousands of people to the area for race weekend twice a year.

During the same ceremony, the chamber also thanked several members rotating off the board, and welcomed their replacements.

Those stepping off included Chipper Washburn, Dr. Terry Graham, Martha Jordan and Shaw Gaines. New officers include Burrage, Hurst, Treasurer Linda Johnson, King, David Akins, Mike Challender, Mark Fielding, Gwen Hail, Kiker, Kisha Linley, Lynne Stanford, Angelia Todd and Mildred Trammell.

King, who continues to serve although she is no longer president, was thanked for "the tremendous progress" made on her watch and the many committees she served on.

"I'm excited about working with the new officers," King said. "It's been a tremendous couple of years, and I know we will continue to make new strides in the year to come."