

YBPA honors prominent organizations, local contributors

Youngstown Lions celebrate 75th anniversary



BY TERRY DUFFY
Editor-in-Chief

The Youngstown Business and Professional Association held a special program as part of its fall members' meeting at the Niagara Frontier Golf Club.

Beyond the typical YBPA updates and reports of activities, the session featured a spotlight on the village and recognitions to Youngstown's prominent organizations and faces. Included were the Youngstown Lions, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2023; the Youngstown Free Library, marking 74 years of service; and Lake Ontario VFW Post 313, for its years of service to veterans dating from the World War II era.

Also, Lew and Kat Bean of the Hill of Beans Coffee Shop were honored as 2023 YBPA Business of the Year; and Youngstown Village Trustee Catherine Stella, a YBPA member, was cited for her years of contribu-

tions to the fabric of the village.

The celebration led off with a neat video highlighting the Village of Youngstown, created by YBPA members Kevin and Dawn Cobello of K&D Action Photo and Aerial Imaging, with narration from Colleen Mary Summerville.

"Tonight, we celebrate the fruition of our grant program," opened YBPA president Cheryl Irish Butera.

The video offered visitors an interesting look into Youngstown from above, focusing on the beauty and qualities of life found in this village at the mouth of the Niagara. Intended for promotional uses of the River Region, the video is funded by the Niagara County William G. Mayne

Lois Kaminski and Stu Comerford of the Youngstown Lions Club. • Youngstown Free Library Director Sonora Miller with Colleen Mary Summerville. • Melissa Kudel with VFW Lake Ontario Post 313 Cmdr. Ed Jackson. • Hills of Beans Coffee Shop owner Lew and Kat Bean with Catherine Stella. • Catherine Stella with YBPA's Cheryl Irish Butera. (Photos by Kevin and Dawn Cobello, K&D Action Photo and Aerial Imaging)

Business/Community Enhancement matching grant program and the Town of Porter.

Leading off was the Youngstown Lions Club.

"Our club was officially formed in 1948, we are celebrating our 75th anniversary this year," said Stu Comerford, Lions vice president. He spoke of the club's founders, including Ted Bliss, Kenneth Comerford formerly of the Old Fort Inn, and his own father, Stu Comerford Sr.

"Since then, we have been active in Youngstown," Comerford said, noting two prominent Lions service projects: Lions Park on Park Place in Youngstown and the Lions' work on vision and hearing services with the Lewiston-Porter elementary schools. "Our president, Lion Lois Kaminski, along with myself and all our members, thank you for our community award."

Kaminski accepted YBPA's proclamation for "outstanding community service" from Secretary Mark Butera. The award stated, "A certificate of recognition proudly presented to the Youngstown Lions Club, for their ongoing achievements over the past 75 years of outstanding community service in the Village of Youngstown."

Kaminski said, "On behalf of all our club members who are here tonight and the rest of our club members, we are grateful, thankful ... honored and humbled to accept this award."

As part of the tribute, YBPA presented the Lions an eight-bicycle galvanized bike rack for use in the village - one of four similar bike racks presented to honorees.

It was announced the Lions will hold an elaborate community celebration for the 75th anniversary on Saturday evening, Sept. 23, in the Youngstown Volunteer Fire Co. firehall. The event includes a sit-down dinner, a reception with live music and a cash bar, and raffles and fellowship. Reservations are required. For more information, contact Lion Nancy Askins at 716-745-3476 or Comerford at 716-807-8875.

Summerville continued with YBPA's recognition of the Youngstown

Free Library, calling it, "a community center, which inspires learning, and provides access to a vast range of information and resources for patrons of all ages."

"Servicing a community of over 1,800 is no easy task. Librarian Sonora Miller and her staff do a wonderful job. In addition to reading and research material, our library offers computers, Wi-Fi, copy services and assistance with technical needs. There is always someone available to help, and the interesting thing that I find tonight is some of the award recipients, like Lois, is part of the library. And some of us that are part of the library are part of the Lions Club. So, it is a great community to be a part of."

"As the Friends of the Library president, it is my pleasure to present this award to Sonora and her staff from the YBPA. A certificate of recognition is proudly presented to the Youngstown Free Library for the ongoing achievement of almost 74 years of outstanding library community services."

"Thank you so much," Miller said. "I just wanted to tell you the library could not exist without the community, from the support of the Town of Porter, the Village of Youngstown, from everyone who donates to the annual fund drive, all the Friends of the Library, the people who volunteer to help out ... the staff who make the library. ..."

"Next year is our 75th anniversary. I'm going to be kicking things off with a giant eclipse viewing for April 8. We have a thousand eclipse glasses; we're going to have a big party."

Next, YBPA member Melissa Kudel of Bandanas recognized Ed Jackson, commander of Lake Ontario VFW Post 313, noting, "Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 313 has been a part of this community since 1945. It was formed by returning veterans from World War II."

"It is important that the general public cannot forget the millions of veterans who came before us and held our respect throughout the ages," she continued. "The VFW is involved ... in education, with scholarships and in history with presentations on our wars. Yet the greatest benefit of the VFW ... is the ability of the veterans to come together and talk about their individual experiences with each other. This ability to come together helps the readjustment process of coming home."

Presenting the YBPA honor to Jackson, Kudel said, "For the ongoing achievement of over 75 years, for outstanding veterans and support and community service in the Village of Youngstown. Thank you, veterans, VFW Post 313."

"On behalf of the VFW, Post 313 and its members I would like to thank you all your support you have given us over the years," Jackson said. He went on to recall his years in Vietnam and the treatment he encountered

upon his return during anti-war demonstrations.

"As my time went on ... with some rough times ... I finally got help, through the VA. ... As I went through that help, one of the things that became important to me was being able to talk about my experiences. ... I thank you all for listening to me, and understanding where we came from. That became a part of my rehabilitation - to being able to talk about my experiences, through some very difficult times."

"The VFW, the Vietnam Veterans of America, helped me, to talk. And that's the most important thing for us veterans - how much the general public cares."

YBPA continued with its presentations, as Stella honored the Hill of Beans Coffee Shop and its owners, Lew and Kat Bean, as the 2023 Business of the Year.

"What can I say about Lew and Kat?" she said. "It's a great place to gather, a great addition for our village. We're happy you have you here and bestow on you the Business of the Year for 2023 from the Youngstown Business and Professional Association."

Accepting the honor, Lew shouted to the crowd, "You all know me ... how ya doin'?" Recalling the rocky start of this business, particularly through the trials and tribulations of COVID, Bean said he soon discovered what a warm community Youngstown really is.

"The coffee shop, I didn't know if it was going to work or anything, but one thing I found out: I opened up the doors and I got to meet a whole bunch of ya'll. And you were so hospitable!"

"I came from a small town in Texas on the Gulf Coast, but my new home is in Youngstown," he said. "I have grown to love it. So many ya'll coming and shooting the bull on the veranda and having a good time. I am so proud to be a citizen of Youngstown."

Wrapping up, Cheryl Butera presented YBPA's first President's Recognition Award to Stella for her contributions to the village. Gifting a symbolic Louisville Slugger baseball bat from her own baseball days, Cheryl said, "It has to do with all the events since COVID, moving forward, our times recently. This person, to me, represents some very important actions."

Comparing those qualities to the sport of baseball - balance, direction and time, she continued, "(That's) the person that I think of who most has those qualities over time, now 16 years. She has been a business owner; she has been a member of the YBPA ... (she does everything.) It's Catherine Stella. You're the first to get the award."

"I'm very honored to take this award," Stella said. "Thank you!"

It was that feeling of appreciation that seemed to signify the whole evening for the YBPA.

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