

East End/Third Ward News

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East End chamber salutes outgoing chair, honors community leaders

By **DOUGLAS BRITT**
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Fighting back tears, the Houston East End Chamber of Commerce's outgoing board chairwoman ceremonially passed the gavel to her successor and received two standing ovations from the 300-member crowd at the chamber's annual awards ceremony on Wednesday.

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"I don't know how you top Taryn McFarlane," said Steve Stewart, president of Gulf Winds International Inc. and the 2007-2009 chairman, of his predecessor, whose term ended Sept. 30. "She will continue to serve on the board, and she will continue to be a guiding force in everything that we do over the next couple of years."

McFarlane, an executive vice president at Gulfgate Center-Wulfe & Co., saw the chamber grow to 500 members during her two-year term and presided over the unveiling of the chamber's East End Strategic Vision — developed in collaboration with the Greater East End Management District and the Community Resource Design Center at the University of Houston — in 2006.

Aimed at facilitating the revitalization of the East End, the strategic vision set goals in the priority areas of education, image, economic development, parks and neighborhoods, infrastructure and historic preservation.

Several of this year's award recipients were hailed for furthering the realization of one or more of those goals:

- Chavez High School Principal Dan De Leon and Stephanie Rivera, a volunteer for the school's Project Lead the Way engineering curriculum, shared the chamber's Education Impact Award.
- Maximus Coffee Group President Carlos DeAldecoa accepted the Economic Development Award for purchasing the old Maxwell Coffee House plant from Kraft Foods Inc. and keeping it open.
- Developers Alan Atkinson and Frank Liu, both praised by chamber leaders for buying what had long been considered undesirable properties in formerly industrial East End areas and launching mixed-use development projects, received the Small Business Award and the East End Amigo Award, respectively.

Other honorees included:

- Roy Zermeno, AT&T's regional manager for external affairs, accepted the Corporate Citizen Award on behalf of his employer.
- Open Door Mission was the recipient of the East End Good Neighbor Award for its social service programs.
- Cynthia Hawk, whom McFarlane jokingly called "the queen of the silent auction," for her work on chamber fundraising efforts, was named Chamber Member of the Year.
- Denice Hollis, a human resources administrator for VAM Drilling and a co-chair of the chamber's Crime Awareness Committee, received the Chairperson's Award.

The awards luncheon, usually the climax of the chamber's social activities for any given year, was the first part of a two-installment event this year because the chamber decided to throw a gala to honor U.S. veterans and raise money to buy a new house for a veteran wounded while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The honorees will be recognized again, briefly, at the Champions of Freedom Gala on Nov. 7. For details and sponsorship opportunities, call 713-926-3305.

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