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Chamber announces Business of the Year award winners

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CHAPEL HILL — The Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce announced the 2013 Business of the Year award winners Thursday at UNC's William and Ida Friday Center for Continuing Education.

Here are the winners, with excerpts from their award presentations:

- The 2013 Chair's Award for Public-Private Partnership is awarded to **Mark Chilton**, former mayor of the Town of Carrboro.

Mark Chilton has a long history of service to our community. Mark began as North Carolina's youngest elected official when he was elected in 1991 to the Chapel Hill Town Council as a student at UNC. Mark went on to earn a law degree, serve our community as a REALTOR and works for community and economic development leader, Empowerment Inc. It is his service as Mayor of Carrboro though, from which he just retired, that earns his recognition. In his time as Mayor of Carrboro, Mark has been a champion for public private partnership and like Carrboro mayors before, proudly represented the pro-business progressives. Mark has demonstrated that one can support economic and community development without forswearing one's interests in the environment or social justice, rather that we must focus on the economy, the environment, and social issues for a community to thrive. Specifically, we want to recognize Mark's creativity and leadership in partnering with the Town and the developers of 300 East Main downtown redevelopment project. Having stalled in a time of difficult financing, Mark applied lessons learned from the 2010 Intercity Visit and Leadership conference in Asheville, and proposed and championed a creative way to make the project move forward. Mark proposed that Carrboro use the future revenue from the incremental increase in tax revenue on the improved property to lease several hundred spaces in the proposed parking garage for five years. This was the breakthrough the project needed. The developer had the guaranteed revenue to assist in securing financing to build the 500 space parking garage. This enabled the new hotel to be built and the citizens of Carrboro get free parking in the deck for five years. Because of Mark's leadership and partnership with the private developer, Carrboro has its first hotel, its first parking deck and the 300 East Main project is well under way.

- The 2013 Chamber Ambassador of the Year is community volunteer **Irene Briggaman**.

Irene Briggaman is our longest serving Ambassador. She has volunteered as an Ambassador when the program was introduced in the early 1980s. More than 30 years later, Irene continues to work with new Chamber members to build a dynamic and plugged-in Chamber membership. Irene says she is inspired by her hard-working, fellow Ambassadors and our most efficient Chamber staff. Irene is an Ambassador because she enjoys meeting such a diverse group of people within the Chamber's membership. Irene says, "The challenge is in understanding each member's reason for joining and how to best match their needs with the programs and services provided by the Chamber." That's a challenge Irene continues to meet with enthusiasm.

- The 2013 Business of the Year (Micro Enterprise), presented by Coastal Federal Credit Union, is **Sweeps**.

Sweeps matches local college students to get just about anything done for \$25 per hour. Popular jobs include moving, cleaning, event help, tech help, tutoring, and much more. More than 500 college students,

Sweepers, have helped more than 2,000 customers in the Triangle since 2010, earning a 98% satisfaction rating while supporting our community through free and discounted services. Founded in 2004 by mother and son Mary Lou and Morris Gelblum, Sweeps was reinvented in 2010 while Morris attended UNC, with the help of fellow students, professors, and many others, and has maintained steady growth since.

• The 2013 Business of the Year (Mid-Size), presented by Harrington Bank, is **Vimala's Curryblossom Café**.

Vimala's Curryblossom Café is a downtown Chapel Hill restaurant that seeks to bring the Chapel Hill-Carrboro community together with love, warmth, and hospitality over delicious, healthy food. Vimala's prioritizes worker, environmental, and social justice; accessibility through affordability; and sustainability at every level. Vimala's pays its employees a living wage, its producers and investors are local, and the restaurant space serves as an incubator for artists as well as a community gathering/teaching/growing space. Vimala's has increased its space by more than 50% since opening, and as a result, hired more staff and increased revenue. Downtown parking, construction, and signage are challenges that Vimala's has overcome with the use of social media and word-of-mouth recommendations. Vimala's "everybody eats" fund serves people in need – regardless of their ability to pay – a life-sustaining meal, and Vimala's contributes regularly to local non-profits and human-interest causes.

The 2013 Business of the Year (Large) is Mebane-based manufacturer **ARCA**.

ARCA designs, manufactures and distributes a wide range of transaction automation systems, specializing in custom bill dispensing and bill recycling devices and the software that controls them. ARCA has offices in North Carolina, Scotland, Northern Ireland, India, and Russia. ARCA's story isn't all that different from a lot of other companies. In 1998, ARCA's CEO and founder, Mort O'Sullivan, had a pretty good idea and ran with it. He knew that cash automation would be a part of the future and found a way to capitalize on it. Now, with customers in more 50 countries, and revenues over \$60 million dollars, ARCA is a worldwide leader in the cash automation field. But really, the company's growth isn't the primary narrative. It's the unique and refreshing corporate culture that Mort instilled. Simply put, people are happy; and that isn't accidental. ARCA prides itself on being a progressive, family friendly workplace that places tremendous value on its employees. The benefits are outstanding – four weeks paid vacation, medical, dental, and other perks including North Carolina's first company-sponsored Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. ARCA supports a small Orange county farmer, while providing employees with fresh, local vegetables weekly at a fraction of the normal cost. ARCA's core business revolves around cash, but people are what make it happen.

The 2013 Non-Profit of the Year, presented by Triangle Community Foundation, is Orange County Rape Crisis Center.

The Orange County Rape Crisis Center has worked to stop sexual violence and its impact in our community for 40 years. The Center provides support to survivors and their loved ones with a 24-Hour Help Line and crisis counseling. After receiving national recognition for the success of its innovative support group program, the Center collaborated with the statewide coalition to create a manual and training program for other anti-violence agencies seeking to create or expand support group offerings. The Center also offers educational programs for both raising awareness about sexual violence and teaching prevention skills. The Center's Safe Touch program has operated in local elementary schools for more than 30 years, teaching children age-appropriate messages about personal safety. For its work training adults on preventing child sexual abuse, the Center recently received recognition as a Partner in Prevention from the Darkness 2 Light Coalition. After rapid growth in recent years, expanding its total number of clients by about 60% and increasing its number of Spanish-speaking clients by 400% in the past three years, the Center is excited to celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2014 with community members, whose support is vital to providing help, hope, and healing in Chapel Hill, Carrboro, and all of Orange County.

The recipient of the 2013 Duke Energy Citizenship and Service Award is Gordon Merklein, Executive Director of Real Estate Development at UNC-Chapel Hill.

The 2013 winner of the Chamber's Duke Energy Award for Citizenship and Service is Gordon Merklein, the Executive Director of Real Estate at UNC Chapel Hill. Some people just get their job done. And for some

people, like Gordon Merklein, getting their job done is just them getting started. Gordon's day job is as a senior administrator at UNC Chapel Hill where bring his 20 years of experience to his job as Executive Director of Real Estate. He oversees the University's property office and the real estate holdings for many of the university's related entities including the Carolina Inn, Granville Towers and University Square. Most notably, Gordon deserves great credit for leading the team that successfully shepherded the 123 West Franklin Street project - \$100 million redevelopment of University Square - through the Town's approval process and earning unanimous approval. But that's his day job. Gordon's second job is as a community servant. Gordon serves on the board of directors of the Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership, the Community Home Trust, the LaUNCH Business accelerator, the Urban Land Institute Regional Initiatives Council. Gordon has also chaired the Orange Water and Sewer Authority Board of directors and played a leadership role on the board of the Kidzu Children's Museum. Most recently he co-chaired the IFC's \$5.7 million capital campaign with former Mayor Kevin Foy making sure the homeless of our community have a safe, warm place to stay and no one goes hungry. After all that, Gordon goes home to his third job as a husband to Catherine Duncan and father of two sons, Sam and Ethan. For his successful economic development efforts, for his service local organizations and the people of our region, for his lasting and impactful work in our community, we present Gordon Merklein with the 2013 Duke Energy Citizenship and Service Award.

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