

# Clayton News/Daily

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## Clayton Chamber of Commerce celebrates 40th year

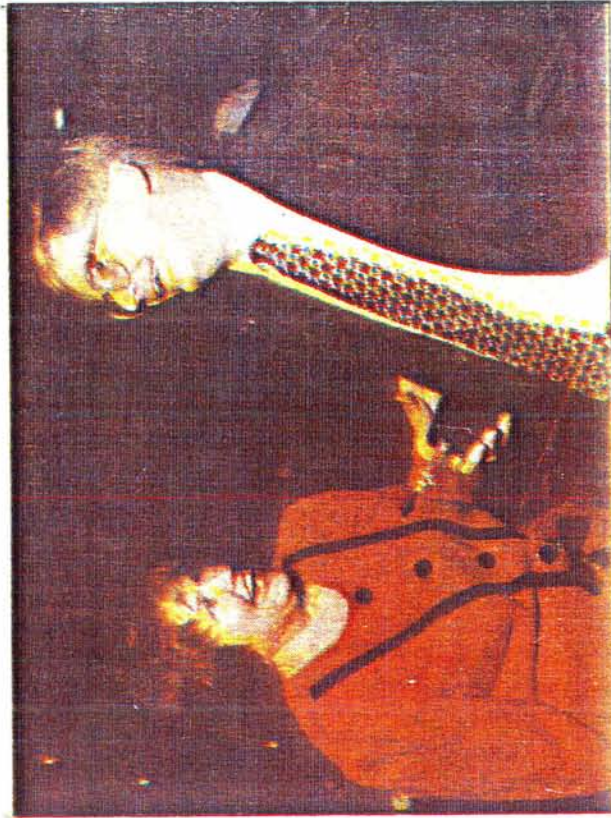


Photo by Bill Yoder

State Rep. Gail Buckner chats with Alfred Dingler during the annual Clayton County Chamber of Commerce banquet Saturday. Dingler, president and founder of Prime Insurance, was this year's recipient of the Clayton County Small Business Person of the Year award.

By Lana Middleton  
Staff writer

COLLEGE PARK — Outgoing Chamber of Commerce Chairwoman Claudia Mertl recognized the achievements of other chamber mentors at the Chamber Annual Banquet and 40th birthday party at the Sheraton Century Hotel convention center, Saturday.

"These are the men that accepted the responsibility to lead the chamber," said Mertl, naming people like the chamber's earliest surviving president Harmon Born, along with Earnest Cheaves, Garry Laggis, Dr. Joe Peak and Chairman Crandle Bray.

Other members she named in the Chairman's Circle, Charles Buckner, Allan Vigil and Carl Rodcnizer, were applauded by the over 500 banquet guests.

Mertl gave a trophy to her predecessor of the chairmanship, Dan Gable. "Because of his efforts, we

have a record-breaking turnout here," she said. Dr. Harry Downs was also honored. "It's hard to sum up the contributions (Downs) has made to our community," Mertl said, thanking him for chairing the local option sales tax committee. "Although he has not retired professionally, he is retiring from the board."

Mertl took time to praise the chamber staff, like Ester Alger and Steve Rieck. "(Steve) has been invaluable; he has gone above and beyond the call of duty," she said.

Born also recounted the years of hard work and the people who did it. He said the citizens powering the chamber's boards and committees hold out the idea of a better community.

"They are givers, not takers, he said. "There's others of us that want to build the community, our recreation departments, our families... and that to me is what the chamber is about," said Born, the fourth chamber president.

Chamber volunteers are impacted by business and have to meet a payroll every month. I think people who work with the chamber have a deep interest in the community and they know the things that will help other people," he said. The chamber is constructed to advance Clayton business and industry.

People active in the chamber tend to dive into many community projects. For example, chamber member, State Representative and Chairman of Olympic Force Georgia, Buckner, is a member of three House of Representatives committees, Clayton Greenway chapter, Histor Jonesboro and the chamber Beautification Committee.

Buckner echoed Born's idea that chamber members get involved in the chamber because they want to see results. "If you're interested in economic development, you realize how the issues in your community affect your economy," Buckner said.