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CONTACT: Emily Counts, emily@getintogrinnell.com or 641-236-6555

Businesses Recognized With Awards at Chamber Annual Celebration

The Grinnell Area Chamber of Commerce at its Annual Celebration, which took place March 16 at Grinnell Mutual's Bartelt Conference & Education Center, recognized Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company as the 2016 Grinnell Business of the Year.

"We were very pleased with the recognition Grinnell Mutual received from the Grinnell Chamber of Commerce," said Larry Jansen, president and CEO of Grinnell Mutual.

"Being a part of Grinnell's supportive and rich community has greatly contributed to our success. The last three years have been the best in the company's 107-year history. Every year is better than the last, which makes me optimistic for the future of the company."

The Chamber recognized Grinnell Mutual for their commitment to the economic vitality and health of the community. Grinnell Mutual is a generous supporter of numerous organizations and community efforts, including projects such as United Way, Road to Success scholarships, Fairground Facelift grants, blood drives, Partners in Education, Badge Day Fundraisers, Toys for Tots, Embrace Iowa: Disaster Relief Fund, Trusted Choice Disaster Relief Fund, Grinnell Regional Medical Center.

"Grinnell Mutual's more than 100 years of investment in the Grinnell community is truly incredible, and we are grateful for their philanthropy to our community," said Emily Counts of the Grinnell Chamber.

"As the largest employer in Poweshiek County, Grinnell Mutual continues to grow their workforce, services and facilities. We thank them for growing their business in Poweshiek County."

Last fall, Grinnell Mutual was named to the 150 Top Iowa Workplaces list for the fifth consecutive year, one of just 13 companies that have made the list for five years running. In the past two years, they have added an on-site health clinic, a fitness facility, and a new conference and education center.

"The completion of these projects demonstrates their commitment to offering top-notch training to their growing workforce, and it is also a testament to their commitment to growing right here in Poweshiek County," Counts said.

"We have strong growth plans in place to remain a competitive force in the marketplace. We love doing business in Grinnell and will continue to grow with the community in the years to come," Jansen said.

The Grinnell Chamber annually recognizes outstanding businesses, organizations and individuals in a variety of award categories. Nominations are sought from the public, with the final recipients chosen by a selection committee comprised of chamber of commerce members.

In addition to naming Grinnell Mutual the 2016 Business of the Year, the Chamber recognized many other businesses, organizations and individuals with a variety of awards during the event, which was sponsored by Grinnell Regional Medical Center. The award recipients and a brief description of each are included below:

Retail Business of the Year: Bates Flowers By DZyne

Bates Flowers by DZyne received the One to Watch Award in 2015 when the owners announced that they were merging their two flower shops into one. During the past year, they have expanded their staff and have also grown their store into much more than just a flower shop. They are also a gift shop, home décor store, tux rental store, and, my favorite, chocolate shop.

Restaurant of the Year: Relish Grinnell

Relish Grinnell has earned a reputation for their commitment to using local foods. One person wrote in their nomination, "They've impressed even my hardest-to-impress friends from France." The chef's love of fresh food is evident on the menu, from selecting product from area growers to visiting with area producers to procure high-quality meats. With everything from great burgers to European and Mediterranean dishes, they add a diverse selection to Grinnell's restaurant offerings.

Service Business of the Year: Grinnell Community Day Care & Preschool

Grinnell Community Day Care & Preschool provides a high quality educational environment for many children in the Grinnell community. This full-service childcare facility, which opened in 1969, focuses on offering a safe environment, great education opportunities, and an experienced teaching staff.

Economic Impact Award: Mayflower Community Watertower Square

The Mayflower Community saw a need in Grinnell for independent apartments for people over the age of 55. Ground was broken on the 10.3 million Watertower Square project in August of 2014, and the first residents moved in this past October. The project added 26 new apartments to Grinnell's housing selection, and beautified an empty lot on the perimeter of downtown. While many residents are from Grinnell, the project has also attracted newcomers.

Community Betterment Award: Poweshiek County Dental Coalition

The Poweshiek County Dental Coalition is dedicated to improving access to local dental care for underserved children in Poweshiek County. They volunteer their time to do educational programming, outreach, and dental screenings. To celebrate Children's Dental Health month each January, local dentists and staff at Dental Associates and Family Dentistry volunteer their time to provide free dental exams to children ages 3-18 who are underinsured or non-insured and have an economic need.

Outstanding Tourism Experience: Grinnell College

Grinnell College welcomes thousands of visitors to our community year 'round for arts events and their Faulconer Gallery; they host a variety of sporting events, with one example being the NCAA national indoor track & field championships they hosted March 11-12. The college also draws visitors for conferences, workshops, student visit days, Family Weekend, and other special events. Their facilities are also a tourism asset and, when

not in use for college purposes, are used to host a variety of purposes that draw visitors. Grinnell College has also recently demonstrated its commitment to tourism by establishing a Grinnell Visitor Experience Task Force to evaluate the community and campus through the lens of a visitor.

Public Servant of the Year: Dave Popp, City of Grinnell Public Service Director

One person's nomination for Dave Popp, public services director, describes him as an "unsung hero." Popp doesn't typically receive a lot of recognition—in fact, he likely hears more complaints than he does 'thank you's'. He approaches every new idea brought to him with a can-do attitude. Popp is responsible for making sure many aspects of the community run smoothly, including maintaining public parks, the cemetery and the streets as well as managing waste and recycling pick up and planting trees. In addition, he is always willing to go the extra mile and help with the extra things like hanging banners downtown, decorating the Christmas tree in the park, and making sure the downtown flowers get watered.

Volunteer of the Year: Ann Brau, Grinnell Farmers Market Volunteer Manager and owner of Compass Plant CSA

Ann Brau devotes significant time and energy into local foods initiatives in our community. She is an active volunteer with a variety of programs including Wellness Wednesdays at the elementary schools and the Grinnell Farmers Market. Not only does she operate a successful business of her own at the Farmers Market, but she volunteers her time as the Thursday market manager. She is instrumental in coordinating the vendors each and every week, and is also very active with planning for the market in the off-season. She gives selflessly of her time and talents and goes above and beyond as a volunteer. As an example of her commitment last spring she personally visited every single market vendor's farm or kitchen to inspect it and ensure they met the requirements of our 100% vendor produced market.

Entrepreneur of the Year: Craig Cooper, owner of Bikes to You and Cooper Real Estate

Craig Cooper demonstrates entrepreneurial spirit, leadership, perseverance, creativity, and determination. With more than 20 years of experience as a successful retailer here in Grinnell, this individual has grown his store into a downtown anchor. He has also focused his efforts on beautifying downtown buildings and adding apartments to our downtown. It's not just his own business ventures that make Craig a good entrepreneur, but also his commitment to the greater good of the community. Craig gives selflessly of his time and resources through serving on a number of boards and donating to many organizations.

One To Watch Awards:

This award recognizes individuals who have started businesses, expanded operations or done exemplary work as part of an organization. These individuals strive toward the highest levels of personal and professional accomplishment, and serve as role models for others in the business community.

1. Jennifer Collins, Grinnell Area Arts Council Arts Education Coordinator
2. Elyssa Halstead, Beau•ty Hair & Nail Studio owner
3. Matt Karjalahti, RE/MAX Partners Realty owner and broker
4. Deb Shearer, Bill's Jewelry owner
5. Rob Whitham, Brown's Shoe Fit Grinnell manager/owner

20 Under 40 Awards:

This award recognizes twenty emerging leaders age 40 or younger. These individuals are recognized for their commitment to community, professional accomplishments and volunteerism. They serve as role models for other young professionals both personally and professionally.

1. Lisa Behrends, Grinnell College
2. Tyson Brandt, Wes Finch Auto Plaza
3. Crystal Burch, Beau•ty Hair & Nail Studio
4. David Counts, Gamers
5. Jarrod Diehm, 1854 Deli
6. Kyle Jaeger, Bikes to You
7. Megan Jensen, Grinnell Regional Medical Center
8. Whitney Jensen, Jensen Optometrists
9. Cara Kenkel, Grinnell Regional Medical Center
10. Lisa Klenk, T.L. Baker & Co., LLP
11. Austin McKenney, Crisis Intervention Services
12. Holly Pettlon, Grinnell Regional Medical Center
13. Rochelle Ragusi, Genesis Development
14. Nicole Sexton, Grinnell College & Chloe & Isabel
15. Melissa Ulrickson, Crisis Intervention Services
16. Briana Vande Stouwe, Community 1st Credit Union
17. Devin Wells, Grinnell State Bank
18. Katy Wells, Double You Marketing
19. Kaitlyn Wilcox, Grinnell College
20. Kyle Wilcox, Grinnell Regional Medical Center