

Best & Brightest winners announced

By David Nordby
 The Brillion News

BRILLION – The winners of the 4th Annual Brillion Area Chamber of Commerce Best and Brightest Awards have been notified, and the list is filled with pillars of the community.

The formal event will be held on Thursday, Oct. 7 at 5:30 p.m. at Round Lake Farms. Cobblestone Creek will cater dinner. Event tickets are available by visiting brillionchamber.com or by contacting Chamber president Tami Gasch.



Zane Zander.

Michael S. Ariens Leadership Award: Zane Zander

With the exception of when he earned a college degree from the University of Wisconsin-Stout and when he served in the Army for 20 years, both active and reserve, Zane Zander has been a resident of Brillion his entire life.

One conversation with Zander can help someone get a high-level history course on the City of Brillion. His resume is long and decorated. He took over ownership of Zander Press in 1965 with his brother Noel, and expanded the company while still serv-

ing the community. Zander has been a member of the Brillion Plan Commission for more than 45 years, a member of American Legion, a member of the Brillion Chamber of Commerce and a founding member of the Brillion Optimist Club. He is currently the last living founding member of the Optimists.

Now, he's being recognized with the Michael S. Ariens Leadership Award. When he was notified, it brought tears to his eyes.

"I was very grateful because it was

a big honor to be selected and chosen," Zander said.

Zander will be the first recipient of the award who was a peer of Michael Ariens.

"I guess it represents honoring somebody that has made a commitment to spend their entire life in Brillion attempting to make it a better community in whatever style of doing that there is, and there's lots of different styles," Zander said.

Public Servant of the Year: Eric Burich

Eric Burich has been a Brillion firefighter since February 2000. That might be the definition of public servant.

"It flies by," Burich said.

In those two decades, Burich went from a young firefighter to lieutenant to now a deputy chief.

"Taking on a leadership role in the last two decades has probably been my biggest change in operation there," Burich said.

Burich is from Brillion and knew he wanted to become involved following his graduation from Brillion

High School in 1999.

"It was something to do after high school. I knew I was going to stick around Brillion and I wanted something to give back to the community, but at the same time, it really intrigued me the idea of being a firefighter and volunteering in that kind of a facet," Burich said.

When he was notified of the award, it hit Burich deeply.

"I'm incredibly humbled. I would have never expected. I'm not a big public speaker, really," Burich said. "Just knowing that there's a lot of really good leadership on the fire department and we're surrounded by great people, not only in the community, but all around."

Business of the Year: Carstens Mill

Beth Wenzel had a vision for the Carstens Mill building. It has now been nearly five years that she has held events ranging from weddings, live entertainment and charitable events.

"It's just really cool that people notice that you're working so hard to do something that makes other people so happy," Wenzel said. "That's what's really cool is that people recognize that."

Wenzel's first idea for the build-

ing was to turn it into apartments. Eventually, in part with the help of her daughter, McKenna, it became a wedding venue.

"Brillion is really located centrally to 450,000 people," Wenzel said. "When she said weddings, I thought I really only need to bring in 100 people."

The venue has filled both of those aspects that Wenzel envisioned.

"If you're going to start a business, you either have to do something that's really going to attract the locals or it's going to attract a certain percentage of those people within that acceptable distance," Wenzel said.

As co-owner of Zander Press, Wenzel says she envisioned herself as the owner of a second business.

"I guess I'm not surprised that it leads towards weddings because prior to coming [to Zander] I was doing a lot of bridal sewing, so I guess I would have thought it would have been more related to that like a dress shop, but it turns out to still be wedding related," Wenzel said.

Brillion Area Family of Funds Volunteer of the Year: Tammy Koehler

Longtime member of the Optimist Club and all-around city volunteer, Tammy Koehler is being rec-

ognized for that time. The award is presented by the Brillion Area Family of Funds.

"I was absolutely thrilled to have been nominated. The volunteers of the year in the past have been wonderful people in the community. It's an honor and I'm humbled, truly," Koehler said.

While Koehler has given her time to the community, she says that she gets something out of it herself.

"You don't really realize what you're getting out of volunteering until you start doing it," Koehler said.

The secret to volunteering might be Koehler's idea that every little bit helps.

"Individually, I like to make a difference and do things that help people," Koehler said. "I'm helping my community one person at a time, one group at a time or trying to make something better in a small group."

Young Professional of the Year: Jessica Wenzel

Jessica Wenzel has become a familiar face for anyone who attends events at Carstens Mill, and her event coordinator position helped lead her to the young professional of the year award.

"I got a little emotional but I felt honored to be named young profes-

sional of the year," Wenzel said. "Out of all the amazing young professionals in this community, somebody recognized me and the work that I do, and for that I feel very humbled."

She says her role at the mill has helped her get to know the community better.

"My favorite part about working at the mill is honestly making people happy. From live music in the summer just to get people out and about, to weddings, to charitable events – I just love to say yes, and to make people happy and smile," Wenzel said.

The charitable events that the mill has hosted are near and dear to her, too.

"When asked to be part of different charitable events, the answer is always a quick, 'Yes! We'd love to help!' I've always had a heart that loves to give, so when you combine Beth's love to give with mine, great things can happen," Wenzel said.

Teacher awards

The night also includes teaching awards, who will be covered in more detail in an upcoming newspaper. The winners are Jaime Cousin (Brillion Elementary School), Lesley Hermann (Brillion Middle School) and Melissa Mathes (Brillion High School).