

Chamber honors L.B. area leaders

AWARDS: Darick Simpson lauded for youth work; role in environment cited for Paramount Petroleum.

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LONG BEACH - More than 600 local business and community leaders gathered Wednesday evening to support dozens who received accolades for their contributions to the city's workplaces, youth and economic vitality.

The 117th Inaugural Gala held at the Hyatt Regency was presented by the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce.

The event honoring local businesses and individuals was the largest put on by the chamber so far with many recipients receiving prestigious recognition, said chamber CEO Randy Gordon.

One of the first top honors of the evening was the Alfred P. Sloan award for workplace flexibility.

Six local companies were honored for their innovative approaches to creating new models for the 21st century workplace. They were AES Alamitos LLC, Healstone, HRNetwork, KPMG LLP, Long Beach Rescue Mission and PeacePartners, Inc.

The honor automatically put all of the companies in the top 20 percent of employers nationwide, said presenter Patricia Kempthorne, founder of the Twiga Foundation, one of the entities that chose the winners.

"I've watched Long Beach embrace the concept of this award and what it means, and it's wonderful," she said.

The recipient of the chamber's annual Dewey Smith Community Service Award was given to Darick Simpson, executive director of the Long Beach Community Action Partnership, for his dedication to youth and education in the city.

LaDonna DiCamillo, director of government affairs for the chamber, described Simpson as someone who has a "vision that every child and young person has the confidence, character, competence, and connections to live a healthy, fulfilling life." Simpson's initiatives such as bringing grants and career opportunities for local youth were also highlighted.

The chamber's most prestigious award of the night dubbed "Destination Tomorrow Award" went to Paramount Petroleum Company.

Gordon said the company received the award because of its commitment to expanding the production of gas while also being environmentally aware.

"They have beaten the standards and lowered pollutants in our air," said Gordon.

Later awards focused on businesses that display excellence in hospitality and make Long Beach a "successful tourism destination."

Honorees included Aquarium of the Pacific, Downtown Long Beach Associates, Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center, Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau, Queen Mary and Savor Catering by SMG.

The chamber also introduced its new incoming chairman Blake Christian while bidding farewell to its outgoing chairman Matthew Kinley.