



Turoski, Helton receive Lee awards

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From left, guest speaker Jackie Cushman, Lee County Chamber of Commerce President/CEO Winston Oxford and Chamber Vice President Lisa Davis talk before the Chamber's annual banquet Thursday at the Hasan Temple in Albany.

ALBANY, Ga. — Bill Turoski and Diana Helton were named man and woman of the year by the Lee County Chamber of Commerce at the chamber's annual banquet Thursday evening.

Turoski and Helton were recognized for their community volunteer work and headlined a list of honorees that included partner in education Martha Dye, partner in agriculture David Byrd, business of the year Lee County Auto Service and nonprofit of the year Boy Scout Explorer Post 9432.

"I wonder each year if the founders of our organization back in 1988 had any idea that their chamber would grow to over 400 members with the attendance at our annual banquet exceeding 200 strong," Chamber President/CEO Winston Oxford said before honoring the community's first responders.

"These are the people who make profound commitments and great sacrifices each day by placing their lives on the line to keep us safe," he said. "Whether you are police, sheriff's deputies, firefighters, part of our CERT team, which performs water rescue, or EMTs, you are our first responders, those who run toward danger not away from it. On behalf of all the citizens of Lee County, we sincerely thank you, and although each of us prays that we will never need your services, we also feel our lives are in good hands if and when we do."

Following the handing out of awards, author/syndicated columnist Jackie Cushman, the daughter of former Speaker of the U.S. House and current Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich, spoke to the crowd.

"I love doing this, but the best part about it is meeting the people," Cushman said before the banquet. "When my dad first ran for office, his district stretched from the Alabama line to Griffin, so I've done a lot of traveling on Georgia's rural roads. We live in a beautiful state."

Cushman, who has published two books ("5 Principles for a Successful Life: From Our Family to Yours," which she wrote with her father, and "The Essential American") said she is currently working on her first novel and traveling the country in support of her father's presidential bid.

"I've done the personal book and the historical book, so the next logical step for me is a novel," she said. "I grew up a reader; I was the little girl sitting in the back of the room reading all the time. And I've always loved reading novels. My book is a Southern political novel, and I'm having fun writing it.

"I'm also enjoying spending time with my dad campaigning. His campaign has been on a steady rise lately, so we're encouraged. That's the thing about politics, you never know what's going to happen from day to day. Dad has an advantage because he's always consistent; he's the same every debate. That's going to help him."

Outgoing Chamber Board Chairman Vince Falcione, the director of external affairs at Procter & Gamble's Albany plant, said he's pleased with the growth of the organization during difficult economic times.

"I think this chamber has done a jam-up job in the last couple of years, especially when you consider what's going on out there in the real world," Falcione said. "Winston (Oxford) and his crew are always out there trying to get businesses interested in our region. The job they do and the outstanding school system we have here in the county are part of the reason life works well here."

Falcione also announced that Oxford and Chamber Vice President Lisa Davis will accept recognition next week as one of the first chambers in the state to earn Georgia Certified Chamber of Commerce designation.

"I'd like to thank our chamber staff for all their hard work in succeeding in their efforts to earn this designation," Falcione said.