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Chamber honors Olson, Campos

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JAN 25 1993

The Harvest Building at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds was packed Saturday night with black-tied and sequined members of the Watsonville community for the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce's Man- and Woman-of-the-Year awards dinner.

After dinner, a promotional slide show about Watsonville, comments by outgoing officers and the installation of new ones, chamber officials got down to the business of presenting the awards.

The Woman of the Year Award went to Sister Susan Olson, head of Pajaro Valley Shelter Services. Olson's program provides long-term temporary housing for people living in substandard housing and others in need, and provides them with child care, job-search training, money management and renter training.

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Susan Olson — Woman of the Year



Photos by Kurt Ellison

Tony Campos — Man of the Year

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Olson is also involved with South County Emergency Services Coalition, Second Harvest Food Bank, Loaves and Fishes, Watsonville Coalition to Prevent Violence Against Women, and Families in Transition.

The award was presented by George Menasco, who said, "Sister Susan has left her mark on the community and we are better off because of it."

As the audience rose to its feet, Olson stepped up on the stage to accept the award.

"I'm glad I knew about this before," Olson said, adding that she got to walk around Watsonville for a week feeling like "everybody loves me."

But also said she didn't feel she could take credit for the award on her own. She asked all past and president board members and staff to rise and be acknowledged.

Then, quoting a Brazilian saying, she said, "When one person dreams, it's only a dream, when many people dream, it becomes a reality."

Olson was also handed proclamations from the State Assembly, State Senate, the County of Santa Cruz and the City of Watsonville, by the respective elected officials. Assemblymen Sam Farr and Rusty Areias, coming from another event, joined Sen. Henry Mello, County Supervisor Ray Belgard and Watsonville Mayor Oscar Rios on stage a little bit later in the evening.

Tony Campos, a city councilman and owner of Coldwell Banker/Campos Real Estate received the "Man of the Year" award. Campos was acknowledged for having risen from his first job packing lettuce to his ownership of the real estate firm, and his many contributions to the business community, the City Council and various charities

including the yearly CanTree food drive and scholarships for local students.

Campos commented upon taking the stage that it was nice to see all his friends.

"Of course," he added, in his typical self-deprecating way, "I had to buy half your tickets to get you here."

Campos thanked his mother and father, who, he said, "kicked me in the rear and said, 'You could do better'."

Salud Para La Gente clinic, which serves mostly poor farm workers, was given the award for "Organization of the Year."

Francisco Juarez-Cahue, vice chairman of Salud's board of directors, accepted the award, noting that even though the state budget had been cut, "Salud has been able to grow."

Mayor Rios, after presenting Juarez-Cahue with the award, commented that the United States is one of the two developed countries that does not have a national health plan. That may change with the new administration, he said, but "while we are waiting, thank you for providing" health care to the poor.

There were two awards for "Event of the Year": one for the Nisei graduating class of 1942 and one for the Watsonville High School Centennial celebration.

Mas Hashimoto, a teacher at Watsonville High School, received the award for the Nisei graduation. Last year, members of the class of 1942 who had been interned during World War II received their diplomas in a ceremony that was part of the regular high school graduation. Forty-seven members of Watsonville High's 1942 graduating class were sent to the camps.

Hashimoto said the ceremony was important. "We needed to show those 47 that we cared, loved and had not forgotten them."

He said he was touched by scenes of children helping their

parents put on their caps and gowns for the ceremony, which was held "50 years later...to the exact day, to the exact hour."

"One man said he was the last of his family to graduate," he said.

Hashimoto thanked Jane Borg for planting the idea for the ceremony and the president of the class of 1992, who, Hashimoto said, told him "We have to do this. We have to give up some of our time for this." He also thanked the Watsonville Japanese American Citizens League, the Pajaro Valley Historical Society and the high school administration.

Senator Mello, handing his proclamation to Hashimoto, said he remembers his friends "being rounded up...without a trial, without filing complaints, without doing anything wrong...it's an atrocity we're begging forgiveness for now."

Rios said the award and recognition serves "as a shield against mistakes that could happen again."

Gerry Martin received the award for the high school centennial.

Mello commented that it's a rarity to have a high school around 100 years in California. Watsonville, he said, is teaching other communities about appreciating and preserving their history.

Assemblyman Farr handed Martin his proclamation, adding jokingly that it was bigger than the ones Areias was giving out.

Areias then handed his proclamation to her, noting that though smaller, it was in a "solid oak wood frame, not that cheap plastic stuff Sam puts out."

Belgard pointed out that his was gold framed.

Rios said, "We just hope the state don't take more money so we can continue to use real good (frames)" on the city's proclamations.

Martin replied, "The one from the city is the smallest, but it is from Watsonville, so it's the dearest."