

Kennett Chamber of Commerce Banquet features Don Downing

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Don M. Downing was the keynote speaker at the Kennett Chamber of Commerce Annual Membership banquet. Downing is a former Missouri chief Deputy Attorney General and managing partner of the st. Louis office of one of the region's largest law firms.

Photo by Jeff Dorris, staff

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The Kennett Chamber of Commerce held their Annual Membership Banquet on Monday, April 29 at the FBC Family Life Center. The event was catered by The Traveling Wisk.

Mayor Chancellor Wayne started the evening off with Pledge of Allegiance and prayer.

The 2018 Leadership Kennett graduates and the Leadership Kennett Class of 2019 were recognized, as well as incoming board members and retiring board members.



Dunklin County Sheriff Bob Holder was honored with the Lions Club citizen of the Year Award for his many volunteer efforts and service to the city. Pictured from left are Judy Holder and Bob Holder.

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Kennett Lions Club President Gary Figgins then presented Bob Holder with the Citizen of the Year Award.

“For the the past four years the Kennett Lions Club has recognized an individual whose volunteerism and outstanding service and dedication have made a significant contribution to the community,” said Figgins.

Figgins continued, “The Citizen of the Year is someone who continually dedicates his or her time and talents toward making Kennett a better place to live, work, and raise a family. This person has made a positive difference to the lives of fellow citizens, and is someone who has shown a willingness to work with others. Someone who is enthusiastic about the community and its citizens.”



Pictured above, the 2019 Leadership Kennett Class from left, Lisa Tucker, Christina Nixon, Camille French, Brenda Ellis, Ann Gardner, Mark Whitehead, Alison Davis, Dana Coffey.

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“This person is someone who exemplifies the qualities of honesty and integrity,” said Figgins. “No one epitomizes that last quality better than this year’s recipient.”

Figgins went on to recognize Holder’s visits to the hospital and area nursing homes.

“Patients and nursing homes residents have received visits each Sunday morning for the past 40-plus years,” shared Figgins. “Smiles and encouragement are powerful medicines.”



Retiring board members from left, Marsha Blanchard, Marty Johnson, Dustin Pritchett with 2019 President Jill Mobley.

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Holder is a past president of the Kennett Chamber of Commerce. He has served on the boards of Boatmen's Bank, Twin Rivers Regional Medical Center and Family Counseling Center. He is a member of the Kennett Masonic lodge and a graduate of the National Certified Auctioneers institute, as well as a licensed real estate broker and insurance agent.

Holder is a member of the Bootheel Drug task Force and a member of the First Baptist Church, where he has served as a deacon.

"He has been a member of the Kennett Lions Club for more than 30 years," stated Figgins.



Incoming board members from left, Meli Purputidis, Michelle Tolbert, Kathy Ballard, Missy Rose with 2019 President Jill Mobley and 2018 President Dustin Pritchett.

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Bob Holder has been the Sheriff of Dunklin County for more than two decades as well.

Jill Mobley followed with the introduction of the keynote speaker Don M. Downing.

Kennett native, Downing is a former Missouri Chief Deputy Attorney General and managing partner of the St. Louis office of one of the region's largest law firms. His private practice has focused on complex commercial and class action litigation.



2018 Leadership Kennett graduates from left, 2018 President Dustin Pritchett presenting to Crystal Dennis, Melanie Dalton-Champlin, Leslie Holloway, 2019 President Jill Mobley and Randy Howard.

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Downing has represented large and small businesses in commercial disputes, including class actions, banks in insurance coverage litigation, Big Four accounting firms in securities and malpractice litigation, and cities, school districts and other public entities in actions against providers of products and services.

“It’s always great coming back home,” said Downing. “Thank you for allowing me to come back and share a few memories about Kennett.”

Downing continued, “Without the Kennett values that were instilled in me by my teachers, my parents, and others, I never would have been able to accomplish what I’ve accomplished in my life.”



Pictured above, a large crowd enjoyed the annual banquet.

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“My dad was Vic Downing,” shared Downing. “He owned a cotton gin in Bragg City, but probably what most people remember him for was being state representative in Pemiscot County and part of Dunklin County for about 20 years.”

“He was an incredible dad,” said Downing. “My dad encouraged me to always play to win .That’s helped me a lot in my career.”

Downing continued, “I also had a wonderful mother,” he said. :She grew up around Senath. I can honestly say that everybody that knew my mom loved her. She just had that kind of personality.”

Downing spoke of his love for the St. Louis Cardinals and admiration for his teacher and coaches throughout the years.

“Many great people were in high school the same time I was,” said Downing.

Downing spoke of many notable KHS graduates including Doug Howard, a successful record producer in Nashville and Sally Stapleton, Pulitzer Prize winning photojournalist and managing editor of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

Downing discussed a few cases he had won in the defense of farmers and concluded his remarks with appreciation for the community of Kennett and one citizen in particular.

“Somebody from Kennett, Missouri made a huge difference in my career,” said Downing. “As a matter of fact, I don’t think I would have had the success I’ve had without this person.”

“His name is Flake McHaney,” stated Downing.

Downing then shared a story on how Judge McHaney took time to meet with him as a young man and assisted him in the beginnings of his career path.

“The fact that a citizen of Kennett, Flake McHaney, took a little extra time, literally made all the difference in my career,” said Downing. “Those are Kennett values.”

“Kennett people are happy and anxious to help people who stay here, and help people who leave here and do amazing things,” concluded Downing.