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PLYMOUTH AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: New state Treasurer Goldberg delivers first official speech

The Plymouth Area Chamber of Commerce kicked off 2015 with its annual meeting and luncheon, naming Greg Brenner, of Brenner Signs & Awnings, as its business person of the year and welcoming Deb Goldberg as the state's new treasurer.

The Plymouth Area Chamber of Commerce kicked off 2015 last Friday with its annual meeting and luncheon, held at Indian Pond Country Club in Kingston, at which members welcomed guest speaker Deb Goldberg, the state's new treasurer, and named Greg Brenner, of Brenner Signs & Awnings, as the Chamber's business person of the year.

The common theme running through the event was gratitude to former Senate President Therese Murray, D-Plymouth, who recently finished her tenure on Beacon Hill. Plymouth Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kevin O'Reilly heaped praise on Murray for her selfless dedication and the multitude of positive changes she effected during her time as Senate president and as senator from the Plymouth and Barnstable District. Goldberg also dedicated a good portion of her time at the lectern to thanking Murray for her commitment and efforts to boosting the economy and well being of Plymouth County and the state. Murray's successor, longtime former state representative and now senator, Vinny deMacedo, R-Plymouth, joined Murray at the event.

Goldberg, giving her first official speech as treasurer, went on to note that consumer spending is up and that the Massachusetts economy continues to outperform most states. The finest public schools and the burgeoning biotech and clean-energy industries are sparking double-digit job growth for the third year in a row, Goldberg said, and the state's population is finally increasing. Massachusetts has the highest bond rating in its history, and careful planning is important to keep these trends moving in the right direction. Massachusetts needs to continue efforts to rebuild its rainy-day fund and to invest in education and infrastructure for long-term sustainable growth, Goldberg added.

She has spearheaded the creation of the Office of Economic Empowerment, she said, which will build a robust, statewide financial literacy program that will empower students with practical education like how to balance a checkbook. This office will also seek innovative solutions to the high cost of higher education, close the skills gap to provide specific training to college students that targets available industry jobs and work toward creating wage equality between men and women, among other tasks.

"Pay equity is not a partisan issue," Goldberg said. "Nor is it a women's issue. This is a family issue."

She noted that wage equality is also long overdue and absolutely necessary to ensure that both men and women can support their families. Women continue to earn 82 cents on the dollar compared to men, she said, and this discrepancy is not good for anyone, let alone the economy.

A strong business background has helped her understand the relationship between state government and business, as well as the importance of small businesses in the commonwealth, she said. Goldberg's family opened a small grocery store in the North End of Boston decades ago – a grocery store that is now Stop & Shop.

She said the state must invest in infrastructure, transportation and education to generate more jobs and foster a trained workforce so that businesses will thrive.

One locally thriving business, Brenner's Signs & Awnings, is celebrating 65 years, O'Reilly said, and Greg Brenner has certainly earned the title of Plymouth Area Chamber of Commerce business person of the year.

"Greg's dad opened his first sign shop in the cellar of Danforth's Bakery in North Plymouth," O'Reilly said. "It was 1949, and George 'Duke' Brenner's new business mostly did paper signs, show cards and truck lettering. When he was 10, Greg started sanding sign boards and painting background and gold leaf lettering for the family business."

Over the years, Duke Signs & Graphics became Brenner Signs & Awnings, and Brenner continued to work his trade, fabricating and welding frames, screen printing and hand lettering signs, pin-striping cars and driving the crane truck, all before his 18th birthday, O'Reilly said. Brenner was just 24 when he bought the company from his dad, and has run it successfully ever since. Today, Brenner's son, Travis, is also involved in the family business, making it a third generation sign company. Brenner being a life-long Plymouth resident and recognized for the second year in a row as the best sign and awning company by Best of Plymouth Awards Business Recognition, O'Reilly said he was honored to announce that he was the Chamber's business person of the year.

Brenner gratefully accepted the award, his voice at times tremulous with emotion. He said he was honored to receive the title.

O'Reilly also honored Murray with a gift for her longtime service – a framed collage of Plymouth photos taken by photographer Maureen Romboldi.

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Massachusetts State Treasurer Deb Goldberg is all smiles during the Plymouth Area Chamber of Commerce 2015 Annual Meeting, held Jan. 23 at Indian Pond Country Club in Kingston. Wicked Local photo/Emily Clark

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