

Four Geauga Businesses Receive CIC Awards

By Ann Wishart

John Rothenbuehler spread the credit for Middlefield Cheese's success around to many players when the company was awarded the Geauga County Community Improvement Corporation's 2013 Legacy Company title last Thursday.

Weaving some family history and a few anecdotes into his short speech, Rothenbuehler told how his father, Hans Rothenbuehler, and Hans Epprecht, founder of Great Lakes Cheese in Troy Township, graduated from friendship to a valuable and continuing partnership as their businesses matured.

Today, John and Debbie Epprecht package and distribute Middlefield Cheese products in a way that ensures a safe, consistent quality, Rothenbuehler said.

He also recognized Hastings Dairy for reliably supplying milk for the production of the company's famous Swiss cheese.

"We need more milk suppliers like Brenda and Lad," Rothenbuehler said.

Geauga County commissioners Tracy Jemison and Mary Samide have been instrumental in helping Middlefield

Cheese with funding, as has U.S. Bank, which allowed the company to make a huge investment in whey production, he said.

He credited the law firm of McDonald Hopkins for its support as well.

Rothenbuehler wasn't finished with his thanks until his closing statement: "All growth ultimately comes from God, whom I give all the glory for this honor."

While presenting Rothenbuehler with a proclamation from the commissioners, Jemison said he'd known Hans Rothenbuehler and last fall, John Rothenbuehler gave him a tour of the plant.

"I couldn't help but think how proud Hans would be," said Jemison.

The traditional video presentation from Lake Erie Video Productions and Bill Ward Productions noted Middlefield Cheese has about 50 employees and has been making award-winning Swiss cheese since 1956.

Gerry Truax, part owner, CFO and COO of Engineered Endeavors Inc. in Newbury Township, said his company came into independent existence in 2008 and managed to survive that economic turbulence.

"The last 18 months we've been



ANN WISHART/GCML

Middlefield Cheese received the Community Improvement Corporation award of a framed map of the county at the CIC annual dinner last Thursday. Pictured (l to r), John Souza and Brenda Hastings of Hastings Dairy, which supplies milk to the cheese company, and Ann Rothenbuehler and John Rothenbuehler, owners of Middlefield Cheese.

growing like crazy," he said.

Truax thanked Anita Stocker, director of the Geauga County Department of Community and Economic Development, for her support.

The company, which designs and produces antenna support structures and utility structures, has 28 employees

Jeff Suszynski, owner of Paul Davis Restoration in Auburn Township, graduated from Chardon High School.

He recalled that, in the spring of 1986, he was focused on taking Cindy Rodriguez to prom and, when he graduated, getting away from Chardon.

Now he is running a smoke and water damage restoration business with 15 employees and he and Cindy are married.

"Cindy and I are extremely honored to be part of the community of Chardon and Geauga County," Suszynski said. "You have done so much for us."

Scott Sopita of BaseTek LLC said his company, which started out at Newbury

Business Park, recently built and moved into a large facility in Burton Township where they design polymer composite castings for the machine tool and rotating equipment industry.

The video, with Ward as narrator, explained the company's polymer concrete base plates are easier and less costly to install, and require no maintenance.

"They are on the level right here in Geauga County," Ward said.

Sopita credited Stocker and Jemison for helping with the funding of the new BaseTek plant and Newbury Business Park owner Chuck White for his early support.

BaseTek has 12 employees and was established in 2001.

"The community has been absolutely wonderful," Sopita said. "We're looking to become stronger partners as we grow."