The annual Chamber Celebration looked much different this year, but the theme of the evening was very familiar – celebrating those who give back to their community.
“We are here to celebrate a year in the making – a year that shook us to the core,” said master of ceremonies Chris Streng from the stage at the Lynne Sherwood Waterfront Stadium.

The celebration was much more casual at the outdoor setting than the typical late-winter indoor event, with those in attendance lounging in bag chairs that were given away as a celebration of the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation’s 50th anniversary.

Elizabeth Curtis Young Professional Award; Barbara Lee VanHorssen receiving the Chamber Spirit of Community Award; and the Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to the family of Howard Reenders.

Lyon, who owns Jumpin’ Java in downtown Grand Haven, recently founded the new nonprofit Kenzie BE Cafe, which is expected to open in the former Crescent Theatre building in Grand Haven’s east side. She started the Celebrity Bartista program to raise awareness and funds for area nonprofits, served on the board of the Grand Haven Young Professionals for five years, was a member of the Re-Imagination Station Capital Campaign Fundraising Committee and serves as a Chamber Ambassador. She also serves as board treasurer for Gracious Grounds and served as chairwoman of the Soup for All committee.

“That was completely unexpected,” Lyon said as she accepted her award. “People say to me, ‘You always say yes.’ All the people here do the same thing. It takes a village to run a village. We all need to give one hour a week to a cause you have a passion for, which will change the community and then change the world.”
VanHorssen has spent her life blending educational pursuits with professional and personal passions. She served on the Grand Haven Human Relations Commission, and is actively involved with the Ottawa County Community Health Improvement Plan and ACES committee, along with the Tri-Cities Suicide Prevention Task Force. She's a member of the Tri-Cities Women Who Care and Spring Lake Rotary Club, and participates in a Chamber Leads Group.

Six years ago, VanHorssen started The Momentum Center for Social Engagement, a grassroots social lab that builds community while providing social and recreational programming for adults and teens dealing with mental health issues, disabilities and addictions.

"Those of you who know me know I'm never speechless, and I have no idea what to say," she said. "I'm incredibly grateful for this community, your care and support for those who are most marginalized. There is nothing I could have done without your support. I am beyond grateful for my incredible staff, volunteers, and members who come to The Momentum Center willing to be themselves, which is a very vulnerable position for many people to take."

In 1946, Arthur Reenders started a construction company to build houses for the post-World War II generation. After graduation, he joined his father's business, along with brothers Arnold and Robert. After many years of building single-family housing, they built Grand Haven's first multi-family housing project, now known as Hawthorn Square, in the 1960s. They also built a series of homes for senior citizens, working with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority to provide affordable housing to everyone, regardless of income.

Reenders Inc. and Heritage Property Management, under the leadership of Howard Reenders and three of his children, continues to work with MSHDA to build, own and manage housing units across Michigan. He has been involved in the development, construction and management of more than 5,000 units.

Howard could not accept his award in person as a recent health issue forced him to spend Tuesday night at North Ottawa Community Hospital, according to his son, Scott.

"It's a real honor to be here tonight, and we're sad Howard couldn't be here to receive this award," Scott said. "It was such an honor to have (Chamber President) Joy (Gaasch) call me and say we'd like to give your dad this lifetime achievement award."

Matt DeYoung