



DAVID DALTON — FOR THE MACOMB DAILY

Pete Blake, owner of Blake Farms in Armada, is presented with the Diversification Leader award by Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel during the Macomb Business Awards breakfast at Fern Hill Golf Club in Clinton Township.

## Celebration of innovation

### Mark Hackel hosts annual business awards breakfast

**By Frank DeFrank**

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It was strictly business, and maybe a little politics, Tuesday when Macomb County hosted its fourth annual Business Awards breakfast.

An estimated 400 persons, most with ties to local businesses, were on hand at Fern Hill Golf Club banquet center in Clinton Township as six county businesses were honored for exemplary efforts.

The event was hosted sponsored by the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development and hosted by county Executive Mark Hackel. Huel Perkins, Fox 2 news anchor, served as master of ceremonies.

“You think about our story here

# Celebration

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in Macomb County, the investment and the growth," Hackel said. "It's because of the business. When the business comes, people have jobs, and then we can start working on quality-of-life issues."

More than 50 Macomb County businesses were nominated in six categories. Each of the nominees was recognized in a video presentation that introduced them as nominees. Hackel then announced the winners.

The awards and the winners included:

- **Champion of Workforce Development**, Tweddle Group, Clinton Township; Tweddle focuses on innovative communications to be address information needs of the automotive industry.

- **Corporate Citizens**, Henry Ford Macomb Hospital, Clinton Township; among many efforts, Henry Ford developed innovative prevention and wellness programs, particularly for under-served populations.

- **Diversification Leader**, Blake Farms, Armada; Blake turned a disaster into an opportunity by using the loss of its 2012 apple crop to freezing weather as a springboard to develop new products, including hard cider.

- **Efficiency Expert**, Pioneer Metal Finishing, Warren; the company made significant capital investments to make its operations more efficient and environmentally friendly.

- **Model of One Macomb**, St. John Macomb-Oakland Hospital, Warren; in response to a rapidly increasing Middle Eastern population, St. John Macomb-Oakland developed several programs to better serve the Chaldean community, including prenatal education and a breast-feeding support group for Chaldean mothers.

- **Start-up Business to Watch**, Bakes and Kropp, Mount Clemens; a manufacturer of cabinets for luxury kitchens, Bakes and Kropp has seen its business grow rapidly, which enabled the firm to hire 12 new employees and triple its production space in less than two years.

Grace Shore, executive director of the Macomb County Chamber of Commerce, said the variety of the type of businesses now operating in the county confirms Macomb as a key eco-

firms Macomb as a key economic player in the region.

"For so many years, Macomb was thought to be a blue-collar county," Shore said. "But no longer. We are high in innovation and technology. ... There's a great opportunity for start-up businesses as well as growth for businesses that have been around for a while."

Wayne Oehmke, Shore's counterpart with the Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce, agreed.

"There were 51 businesses nominated, from little businesses to very large corporations," Oehmke said. "There a lot of people here and a lot of excitement. The diversity of things that are going on in Macomb County is absolutely amazing."

John Paul Rea, recently appointed as director of Macomb County Planning and Economic Development, also announced two special awards.

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation as the Economic Development Partner of the Year; and retired planning director Stephen Cassin was recognized as a Beacon of Economic Development.

Hackel said the quantity and quality of businesses in Macomb County provides reason to be optimistic about the county's economic future.

"Everything from the Big 3 each investing a billion dollars to the small mom-and-pop shops, and the ones reinventing themselves, there's a lot of energy and a lot of excitement," the executive said.

For more on the winners, a complete list of nominees and additional photos from Tuesday's event go to [macombdaily.com](http://macombdaily.com) or see Sunday's print editions.