

A role model couple

Bittners are named 2015 Distinguished Citizens by Iroquois Trail Council

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Photo: Margo and Jim Bittner

Margo Sue and Jim Bittner have been named 2015 Niagara County Distinguished Citizens by the Iroquois Trail Council, Boy Scouts of America.

The Bittners will be presented with their award on May 28, at the 40th annual Boypower Dinner at Genesee Community College, Batavia.

Boypower Distinguished Citizen awards recognize individuals' positive countywide impact through community and professional service.

For over 30 years, the Bittners have been involved in the Niagara County community through their volunteer work and businesses. Both are graduates of Cornell University who made their home in Appleton after schooling. As part of Retawta farms, Jim Bittner and his partner milked 80 cows and won numerous awards. In 1991, he became the managing partner of Singer Farms, a fruit farm established by the Singer family in 1912.

The business, now known as Bittner Singer Orchards, is a wholesale operation providing fresh fruit to various farmers markets and grocery chains. In addition, Bittner Singer Orchards provides all of the peaches for the annual Lewiston Peach Festival.

Jim Bittner currently is president of the Niagara County Farm Bureau, vice president of the Niagara County Soil and Water Conservation District board, treasurer for the Barker Lions Club and chairman of the New York Farm Viability Institute. He also is active with the New York State School of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University.

Margo Bittner owns The Winery at Marjim Manor and uses many of the fruits grown at the family farm as the basis for her wines. Over the years she has been involved with a diverse group of volunteer organizations, from La Leche League, Barker PTA and the Barker Central School Board of Education, to the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency board of directors, A.M. Lockport Toastmasters (with which she holds the rank of Distinguished Toastmaster) and Barker Lions Club. For many years she coordinated the religious school at Congregation Havurah and recently was the substitute clergy at Temple Beth El in Niagara Falls.

The Bittners' sons, Kevin and David, work at Bittner Singer Orchards and their daughter, Janet, works at the winery.

Says James McMullen, Iroquois Trail Council scout executive, "The Boy Scout Oath states, 'to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.' Through their business dealings and volunteer work, the Bittners strive to reflect these values."

Also to be honored as Iroquois Trail Council Distinguished Citizens this year are John Riter from Genesee County, John Noble from Wyoming County, Bob and Eric Brown from Orleans County and Rick French from Livingston County.

Of its Distinguished Citizens, Boypower Dinner chairman Roger W. Triftshauser said, "We couldn't ask for a better group of role models for our Scouts."

The annual dinner is the premier fundraising event to support scouting programs for more than 3,000 boys and girls ages 7 to 20 in the five-county region.

This year's keynote speaker is Gale Buchanan, a former USDA undersecretary and leading researcher in the field of sustainable agriculture.