

# LOCALNEWS

## Cynthia Warren named Citizen of the Year

Chamber announces date for annual awards banquet

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Cynthia Warren has been named 2014 Citizen of the Year, according to Faye Whitbeck, president of the International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce.

Selection, by an anonymous committee comprised of chamber members who are not board members, began Wednesday following the April 1 submission deadline.

Nearly a dozen individuals were nominated for the honor, Whitbeck said. "And the committee reported selection was a very difficult task."

Warren is admired for her work with the organization Friends Against Abuse, the

elderly in the community, church projects and cooking contributions. Her assistance to incarcerated women at the local jail, as well as her inspirational messages to people undergoing dependency treatment, was also cited.

"She does so much to help so many that are struggling," said a nominator. "Cynthia Warren is a great citizen who does great things for our community."

Whitbeck said Warren was notified by telephone Friday and responded with astonishment. "What an honor and a surprise," she said quietly and in tears.

A March 27 Journal Letter to the Editor written by Warren – herself now five years into recovery – expressed her commitment to making a difference for those suffering with pain, loss and addiction: "Addiction to drugs and alcohol is ... Taking the lives of our children, young adults, teachers, students, nurses,



Cynthia Warren

lawyers, and yes, even doctors; among thousands of others in every walk of life.

"Addiction is not fussy; it will take anyone in its path and usually wins. We as a community, as concerned citizens not just of International Falls but of the world, need to stand up, speak up,

and start fighting this insidious disease before it devours more of our own, leaving in its wake sadness, loss, unending grief, destruction and devastation to ourselves and society."

Warren said she is grateful for her own recovery and admirers say her message is followed by action.

Selection was difficult for the committee, Whitbeck said. Deliberations over an impressive list of nominees continued for two days.

"We agree they were all worthy of the award in one way or another," said a member of the committee. "To be nominated should be an honor for all the individuals."

The significance of the deeds of many of the candidates compelled committee members to extend their hope that these nominees feel honored, too," Whitbeck said. She asks that nominators keep these deserving candidates in mind and

nominate them again next year.

Citizen honoree Warren will be presented with the award at the chamber's annual spring dinner beginning at 6 p.m. May 22 at Leonard's in AmericInn. The after-dinner program will also include guest speaker – CEO Mark Kowlzan of Packaging Corporation of America – the company which now owns local Boise Paper.

"We are so privileged to have Mr. Kowlzan accept our invitation to address this event," Whitbeck said. This will give him a chance to meet members of the business community and the community at-large. It gives us a chance to show appreciation for the vital operation Boise has in our community."

The event will also mark the first time Chamber Pillar Awards will be given to six businesses which this year are the top supporters

of the Chamber – investments that help project the voice for the business community as well as sustain an organization which specifically provides business values and services, and ultimately fortifies the greater community, Whitbeck said. The Pillar businesses are Boise Paper, Bremer Bank, Coca-Cola Bottling of International Falls, The Journal/North Star Publishing, KGHS/KSDM and Midcontinent Communications.

This spring gala is open to the public and Chamber members will receive mailed invitations. Reserved, pre-paid attendance is \$35 for an evening of socializing, dinner, cash bar, silent auction and the program. Reservations for individual seating or tables of eight to 10 people should be made by May 19 by stopping at the chamber, calling 283-9400 or emailing faye@intlfalls.org.

## House and Senate agree on legislation to increase the minimum wage

Vote expected in House and Senate this week

MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE

Monday, House and Senate DFL leaders and key legislators announced they have reached agreement on legislation to increase the state's minimum wage. The agreement would increase the minimum wage to \$9.50, phasing the increase in by 2016. The minimum wage would also be indexed

to inflation beginning in 2018 under the oversight of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry, helping to ensure workers earning the minimum wage will not fall behind as the cost of living increases in the future.

"We are pleased to reach agreement on a strong minimum wage that will help Minnesota workers, and in doing so, strengthen Minnesota's economy," said Speaker Paul Thissen. "While Minnesota's economy is improving there are too many Minnesotans who work hard every day but

cannot make enough to make ends meet. It's time to raise the wage and make hard work pay in Minnesota – now and into the future."

"Achieving a meaningful increase to Minnesota's minimum wage has been our priority from the start of session, and today's agreement puts us very close to passing \$9.50 on to Governor Dayton," said Senate Majority



Sen. Tom Bakk

Leader Tom Bakk. "We value work in Minnesota, and our minimum wage ought to reflect that. Lifting up our lowest paid workers is good for families, it's good for our communities and it's good for our economy."

The agreement to raise the wage is the product of work by House and Senate bill authors, minimum wage coalition supporters, and House and Senate DFL leaders.

Details of the agreement include:

- \$9.50 minimum wage for businesses with gross sales over \$500,000 in 2016.

- \$8.00 in August 2014, \$8.50 in August 2015.
- \$7.75 minimum wage for businesses under \$500,000 in gross sales in 2016. \$6.50 in August 2014, \$7.25 in August 2015.
- The \$7.75 minimum wage rate would also apply for large businesses in the following circumstances: 90 day training wage for 18 and 19 year olds, all 16 and 17 year olds and employees working under a J1 visa.
- Beginning in 2018, all wages would increase each year on January 1st by inflation measured by the implicit price deflator capped at 2.5%.

- The indexed increase could be suspended for one year by the Commissioner of DOLI if leading economic indicators indicate the possibility of a substantial downturn in the economy. The suspension could only be implemented after a public hearing and public comment period. In better economic times, the suspended inflationary increase or a lesser amount could be added back into the minimum wage rate in a subsequent year.

House and Senate DFL leaders said they expected to pass the bill this week.

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