

# Chamber Dinner Celebrates Sumter Businesses

By **PATRICIA STEELE**

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## THE VILLAGES

The annual Sumter County Chamber of Commerce dinner and awards banquet celebrated Sumter County with glitz and glamour Friday evening at Savannah Center.

The decorations provided the glitz and the evening attire provided the glamour.

"The room is really beautiful, and it's really an exciting evening for me," said Billie

Faye Smith.

Her husband and business partner, Danny Smith, of Smith and Smith Realty, was named 2016 Business Man of the Year.

Danny has spent the last 20 years in real estate, after working in farming for several years.

"Combining the two sometimes makes it easier to sell large tracts of land that's primarily been used as agriculture," Danny said.

Amy Pittman received the Business Woman of the Year recognition.

Pittman has practiced law in the area for about 10 years, most recently in her own business in Oxford.

"This is such a unique community. It offers businesses of all types the opportunities to grow and succeed," Pittman said. "I'm looking forward to the next 10 years."

Global Contracting Group LLC was recognized as Outstanding Large Business of the Year, and VanVoorhees, Elstad and Associates was named Outstanding Small Business for 2016.

Eric Brown with Global Contracting shared Pittman's positive view of potential in Sumter County.

He started his business in 2005 with a handful of employees serving Central Florida. Now his business is active in five states and he has more than 200 employees.

"I don't think people who live here realize what a unique place this is," Brown said. "There's a lot of opportunities to be had in this area. It truly is an oasis."

Chamber member and volunteer Sheri Britt was named the Chamber Volunteer of the Year. The Sumter County Sheriff's Office Community Outreach was named the Outstanding Non-Profit of the Year.

The businesses and individuals were nominated for the honor by fellow Sumter County business owners and residents.

During the annual meeting, Sumter County Commission Chairman Doug Gilpin greeted the business community with several positive facts about Sumter County.

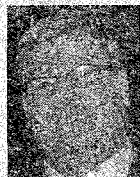
"The county has gone for 13 years without a tax increase," Gilpin said. "The basic reason we can do this is the continued growth in residential, commercial and industrial areas in the county."

Sumter County continues to have exceptional workforce growth, road improvement, and Gilpin anticipates many opportunities for businesses to prosper with America's new president, he said.

The evening wasn't all work. There was time for Elvis (Austin Irby) a ballroom dance demonstration by Greg Nelson and Rachel Palmieri.



**Pittman**



**Smith**