

# Sumter Chamber Celebrates County

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Sumter County business leaders gathered Friday to once again celebrate the past and look forward to the future.

The Sumter County Chamber of Commerce held its annual business meeting and dinner Friday at Savannah Center. The chamber was established more than 90 years ago to promote the county and support area businesses.

The annual event has changed through the years, but the chamber leaders' desire to move the county forward

is constant.

Chamber President Brett Hage acknowledged that times were rough in past years, but he said with hard work and dedication, the board of directors worked together to make improvements.

"The Chamber has never had a home since its inception. We've always leased a building," Hage said. "This year, we were able to purchase our building in Lake Panasoffkee. It's completely paid for and we're on a stronger financial standing."

Hage said the board has worked for the past several years to navigate the Chamber to better times.

"We've all worked together to build a stronger Chamber to help our members grow their businesses," Hage said.

Friday's event was much more than a catered dinner and a business meeting to install officers and board members. It included silent and live auctions,

while several individuals, organizations and businesses were recognized for their contributions to the business community and the community at large.

Dawn Hodges was recognized as Outstanding Chamber Volunteer of the Year for volunteering for more than 10 years in various roles.

The Outstanding Nonprofit of the Year was House of Hope. The faith-based residential program assists men dealing with substance abuse.

La Hacienda Catering was named the Outstanding Small Business of the Year and SECO Energy was honored as Outstanding Large Business of the Year.

Connie Mahan, of Connie Mahan Realty, was recognized as Business Woman of the Year.

"I first joined the Chamber in 2002 and I can definitely say that being part of this organization has helped me be successful," Mahan said.