

New Lakewood Ranch Business Alliance leader sees growth in 2013

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Violeta Huesman of Keiser was the recipient of the Lakewood Ranch Business Alliance Chairman's Award. JAMES A. JONES JR./BRADENTON HERALD

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LAKEWOOD RANCH -- Tommy Klauber, who found his passion in the kitchen decades ago, shared some of his ambition for the Lakewood Ranch Business Alliance on Wednesday.

Klauber, owner of Polo Grill and Bar and the new Alliance chairman, would like to see the business group add 200 members in 2013, as well as a Young Leaders Alliance for members younger than 40, and an ambassadors group that could meet with business representatives considering a move to Lakewood Ranch.

Klauber put the emphasis on his vision for the future, and related how he started working in his family's businesses at age 13, including stints as a window washer and bell hop, before working his way through kitchens in New Orleans, Paris and Italy.

Klauber paid tribute to his predecessor, Brian Volner of C1 Bank, who led the Alliance through a challenging 2012.

"Those are big shoes to fill," Klauber said.

Looking at statistics from 2011, which estimated Lakewood Ranch's population at 16,408 with a median age of 45 and a median household income of \$84,095, Klauber said "this is a young community."

Lakewood Ranch is already home to more than 900 businesses, and he asked members to imagine how many more hotels and businesses would open there in the next decade.

"Think about that doubling," Klauber said, adding that the Alliance can help make a significant difference in the region.

Outgoing chairman Volner recognized outgoing board members, and announced that Violetta Huesman of Keiser University was the recipient of the Chairman's Award, based on her exceptional commitment to the Alliance.

"Wow, I think this is the only time you'll find me speechless," said a visibly moved Huesman in accepting the award.

Then she added, "I look forward to seeing you at next Wednesday's meeting. Bring your smiles."

Volner called the Alliance a "dynamic member-run organization," and said members should be excited about the past year and the year to come.

One thing that won't change in 2013 is that the Alliance will continue to be a lean, mean organization that puts its emphasis on its members and improving the business climate, Klauber said.

"Cooking and hospitality is how I see the world. Everybody is your customer," Klauber said. "There is not an interaction you have during the day that is not important."

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