

And the Winner Is . . .

The San Ramon Chamber of Commerce hands out awards every year for community service. In past years winners were announced at the Installation Dinner for new officers. This year, with Carolyn Degnan as the new President and CEO of the Chamber, four nominees in each category have been announced in advance. The Winner will be selected from the four nominees.

I have been honored to be nominated as Citizen of the Year. I might even have a hope of winning, except for the other nominees. My competition includes:

Terry Cunningham, who founded the San Ramon Community Theater. According to Monica Lander's column in the *Times*, Cunningham wanted to create a theater that was "comprised of regular people who can barely fit this activity into their schedules." Cunningham recently appeared as Scrooge in a production of *A Christmas Carol* at the Front Row Theater in Dougherty Valley.

Joyce Feldman Chaired the 2005 Ambassador Committee for the Chamber of Commerce. She is on the leadership committee for Cub Scout Pack 203 and coordinated her neighborhood block party for National Night Out.

Mike Conklin, founder of Sentinels of Freedom, started this organization to help wounded veterans get on their feet again, even those who have no feet. The Sentinels of Freedom scholarship program has helped four seriously injured soldiers, double and triple amputees, with housing, a job, and an education. Conklin is expanding the program to Danville and Livermore, with plans to go nationwide. This is a wonderful program, which I have no doubt will become a model for how to treat our returning veterans in the future.

No disrespect to Cunningham, Feldman, or even myself (I love the publicity), but my vote goes to Conklin. After I told my mother what he's been doing for the past few years, even she agreed he should win.

Mayor Wilson announced that Mike Conklin won the award as Citizen of the Year in a prerecorded video. But Mike wasn't at the Awards Dinner to accept it. No he was in Washington, D.C. arranging for two more wounded soldiers to come back to the Tri-Valley for Sentinels of Freedom Scholarships.

Dan Coleman, one of the Board Members, accepted the award in the name of the Sentinels of Freedom. That was the listing in the program and in the newspapers. Each of the nominees wrote their biography for the program. Mike didn't write one on himself. Instead the program listed Mike and five other members of the Board of Directors. That's just like Mike, to share the credit.

It's rare when someone wins an award and is too modest to accept it. Sure the award winner reads a laundry list of thank-yous, but rarely do they hand their Oscar or Emmy to someone else. This actually happened at the 1998 Golden Globe Awards. Actor Ving Rhames won for his role as boxing promoter Don King in a cable biopic. He insisted Jack Lemon take the award for his role in *12 Angry Men*. Lemon looked perplexed, but Rhames was adamant that Lemon should have the award. Mike is also sharing his award with Mike Doyle, Dan Coleman, Ron Lowe, Skip George, and Bill Hoelskin. Congratulations to them, and to all of us. We are all winners to have the Sentinels of Freedom in San Ramon.