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TOP STORY

Chandler, Key newest members of JA Business Hall of Fame

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com 17 hrs ago



Chandler Real Estate founder Dave Chandler (left) and Key Oil Company founder Lester Key pose for pictures Thursday, March 21, 2019, during Junior Achievement of South Central Kentucky Business Hall of Fame induction at Knicely Conference Center. (Bac Totrong/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Bac Totrong/Daily News

Known for growing their businesses, David Chandler and Lester Key were also singled out for their giving Thursday as they were honored as the latest members of the Junior Achievement of South Central Kentucky Business Hall of Fame.

Chandler, founder of Bowling Green's Chandler Real Estate and developer of millions of dollars worth of commercial and residential projects throughout the Southeast, and Key, founder of Franklin's Key Oil Co. that has grown into a fuel distributor with 18 locations serving five states, were honored at a breakfast meeting at the Knicely Conference Center.

Their inductions brought the number of Hall of Fame members to 32.

Junior Achievement President Drew Martin said Chandler and Key are worthy additions, both for their business success and their philanthropy.

"These two rose to the top of the crowd of nominees, and they are definitely worthy of being recognized," Martin said. "It's always important to give back and have a philanthropic spirit, and these two have done that."

Chandler, an Oklahoma native who earned a degree in geology at Western Kentucky University, worked in that field for a couple of years before – as he said Thursday – "my entrepreneurship took over."

It took over in a big way. Chandler has been the driving force behind developing nearly 120 properties across the Southeast. His developments, including the Chandler Park residential and commercial project on Cave Mill Road and The Vue development underway now on Lovers Lane, are worth an estimated \$800 million.

But, in a video tribute, Chandler was singled out for a different type of building project that has added to his Hall of Fame credentials.

Speaking on the video, former Broadway United Methodist Church Pastor Rick Bard said Chandler has been a key benefactor of The Foundry Christian Community Center on West 11th Avenue.

"Dave has been by my side for the last four years on this project," Bard said in the video. "The preschool program gives children in an underserved part of town a chance to succeed."

Chandler downplayed his philanthropy, saying: "Everybody does their part." But he didn't downplay the significance of joining a Hall of Fame that includes such Bowling Green-area notables as David Garvin of Ironwood Farms, Jimmie Gipson of Houchens Industries and Cal Turner Sr. of Dollar General.

"This is a special recognition," said Chandler, 60. "The Junior Achievement Hall of Fame has kind of been the who's who of business leaders through the years."

Likewise, Key's family members expressed their appreciation of the Hall of Fame recognition.

Key was on hand to receive the award, but his son and daughter spoke on behalf of the 80-year-old.

"He's not one to be in the limelight," Cindy Dickman said of her father. "He doesn't like all the hoopla. But I'm thrilled for him. He has worked hard."

Dickman explained that Key was working at a Louisville cigarette factory in the early 1960s and moonlighting at a service station. He eventually bought his own service station in Franklin, and Key Oil was born.



From that start, Key built Key Oil into a company that is now the largest distributor of branded motor fuels for Marathon Petroleum and markets products under the Marathon, BP, Valero, Exxon, Mobil and Citgo brands. In addition to building his company, Key has

also served as a director for several southcentral Kentucky banks.

"Lester is a true entrepreneur," said Ann Puckett of the BKD CPAs & Advisors firm in Bowling Green, speaking on another tribute video. "I'm not sure you could find anyone more deserving. He started from scratch."

His business success allowed Key to give back to the community, largely through funding scholarships at WKU.

"He is a big contributor to WKU scholarships," Dinkman said. "He's a big supporter of Western."

In accepting his Hall of Fame recognition, Chandler paid tribute to his fellow inductee and philanthropist.

"Lester has been a friend for many, many years," Chandler said. "I couldn't be more proud to go into the Hall of Fame alongside him."

– More information about the JA Business Hall of Fame and a list of past inductees can be found at the juniorachievement.org website.

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