

Brenntag Named Industry of Year

The Gleaner, by Chuck Stinnett

Brenntag Mid-South -- one of Henderson's oldest industries, and the most recent to announce expansion plans here -- was honored Thursday as the Henderson Chamber of Commerce's 2009 Industry of the Year.

Although its ownership has changed more than once, and is now part of a global company, Brenntag Mid-South has kept its headquarters in Henderson, where it was founded as PB&S Chemical Co. in 1947.

"Joel Hopper, the president, is amazing," Henderson County Judge-executive Sandy Watkins, who presented the award, declared. "His love for Henderson is one of the main reasons Brenntag still has its headquarters in 42420 today. Joel Hopper is definitely behind that."

Brenntag "is one of those premier companies," Watkins said.

The company's chemical distribution plant employs 125 people, while the headquarters employs another 80. The headquarters oversees 26 locations in 10 Midwestern and Southeastern states.

The company in August announced a \$1.6 million, 27,000-square-foot warehouse expansion that is expected to result in new jobs in the coming year, perhaps starting early next year.

Watkins applauded the company's community participation, which began with the company's co-founder and former owner, the late Raymond B. Preston.

"Brenntag Mid-South always supports its employees' involvement," Watkins said. "It's doubtful any industry has made more contributions than Brenntag Mid-South, long-term."

Company employees have been active in the Henderson Chamber, Henderson County Riverport Authority, economic development, Operation Community Pride, the Henderson City-County Planning Commission, Methodist Hospital and St. Anthony's Hospice, among other organizations.

"They're involved in every piece of fabric in this community," Watkins said.

Brenntag also is committed to continuous employee training and career development.

Watkins said he was incredulous when Kevin Sheilley, president and CEO of the Northwest Kentucky Forward regional economic development organization, called earlier this year to inform him that an existing industry was preparing to expand.

"I said, 'Kevin, are you sure? Things are not going very well right now' " in the nation's economy, Watkins said. "He said, 'Well, I'm telling you.'"

"Regardless of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, they're still willing to invest in Henderson, Ky. That speaks volumes about Brenntag."

Hopper, a Henderson native who joined the company as a buyer in 1973, was on a business trip Thursday, according to Watkins.

Accepting the award in his absence was Corey Roberts, the company's director of corporate safety.

"Mr. Hopper's commitment to this community is one reason Brenntag has remained in Henderson, Ky., and will grow with the announcement of this expansion," Roberts said. "We are committed to grow jobs in this area," he said. "We are very proud to have our heritage in Henderson, Ky."

"Henderson is a better place today because Brenntag is in Henderson," Watkins said.