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Mike Schwenk, seen here with his wife Sharon and son Brian, was named the 2008 Tri-Citizen of the Year on Saturday. Schwenk is the vice president and director of commercial partnerships for Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

## Committed to community

PNNL executive honored as Tri-Citizen of the Year says recognition because of collective effort

**KRISTIN M. KRAEMER**

HERALD STAFF WRITER

A community advocate for education and economic development was named 2008 Tri-Citizen of the Year on Saturday.

Mike Schwenk was stymied and teary-eyed at being singled out for his longtime commitment to the Tri-Cities — a place he's called home for nearly 30 years.

"I'm going to have to keep it light or I will never get through it," he said, wiping his eyes while receiving the honor. "I am incredibly humbled and moved by this, and can't thank you all enough."

Schwenk is the vice president and director of

commercial partnerships for Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. He said during the introduction he had flashbacks over his years of service, and one notable memory was his effort to minimize job losses with the 1988 closure of N Reactor by launching Tri-Cities Renaissance, an economic revitalization and diversification program.

Schwenk said his recognition is because of a collective effort, even though this "just happens to be my year."

"This isn't about me and this award isn't mine. I think it's about all of us and this award is ours," he said.

The Richland resident was joined on the stage by his wife Sharon, their two children Brian and

Stacy, and a half-dozen other family members. He was introduced by George Garlick, the 2007 winner, before a record-breaking crowd of 450 at the annual award banquet at the Pasco Red Lion.

"This individual's career encompassed many of the company's in our community," Garlick told the audience. "What was important was not the 'What' he did because he does everything with unbounded energy. More importantly, it was because he saw the opportunity for our community to have a lasting impact on the local area, the state, the country and the world."

Schwenk was nominated by Brad Fisher, senior

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vice president and branch director of RBC Wealth Management, and jointly by Carl Adrian, president and CEO of the Tri-City Development Council, and Karen Blasdel with PNNL's community and regional outreach.

Fisher said Schwenk was the perfect candidate because he "embodies the true spirit of this award ... service above self!" He described Schwenk as a gifted community servant who can lead effective discussions and quickly get to the heart of an issue.

The event — which has recognized 42 Tri-Citizens during its 37 ceremonies — has been organized by local

Rotary clubs since 1980, but this year included Kiwanis, Lions and Soroptimist clubs. An independent committee selects the recipient.

Sandy Matheson, the 2003 Tri-Citizen of the Year, said in her endorsement letter that it's a joy to work with Schwenk because his serious leadership is peppered with "uproarious humor."

"Mike becomes a leader in every organization he joins because he has the rare combination of meaningful vision, the ability to communicate and the ability to implement his vision ...," said Matheson, director of the state Department of Retirement Systems. "His list of community activities can

best be described as 'everything.'"

Schwenk was the owner and operator of General Business Services for two years in the mid-1980s. He has served as director of Fluor Daniel, Westinghouse Hanford, ICF Kaiser International and RL Ferguson and Associates, and was executive vice president of TRIDEC from 1986-89.

He is chairman of the Washington State University Tri-Cities Advisory Council, the TRIDEC board and the Three Rivers Community Roundtable, while also serving as co-chairman for the Tri-City Chamber Higher Education Task Force.

His lengthy résumé lists numerous organizations and boards, including

the Richland School Board and the Richland School District Foundation, CREHST, Columbia Industries, the Blue Mountain Council for Boy Scouts of America, the Washington Export Council and the Leadership Task Force on Sustainable Development.

Schwenk has been the recipient of several community service awards, most notably the 2003 Sam Volpenst Leadership Award.

The 15 letters submitted in support of Schwenk's nomination were a who's who of the Tri-Cities, including WSU Tri-Cities Chancellor Vicky Carwein, Herald Publisher Rufus Friday, Agri-Northwest President Don Sleight, Rich Foeppel, president and CEO of

Columbia Industries, and Pasco City Manager Gary Crutchfield.

"Mike has volunteered hundreds of hours of his own time, expecting nothing in return, simple because he cares about the Tri-Cities community and its people," said Kris Watkins, president and CEO of the Tri-Cities Visitor & Convention Bureau.

Jim Toomey, the Port of Pasco director, said, "Mike's involvement was never about Mike. He has always been making something bigger, making something better and making something that would have a sustained benefit for all."

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