



# Chamber Connection

Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce Newsletter

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"Chamber Connection"

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**SPECIAL  
EDITION**

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## Allison to lead the Chamber board

*Plans to focus on the question 'how'*

by Kelly Grinsteiner  
Assistant Editor  
Hibbing Daily Tribune

Published: Monday, February 7, 2011 6:06 AM CST

HIBBING — Scott Allison will take the top seat on the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors for 2011.

The announcement was made Friday during the Chamber's 106th annual dinner and auction held at the Hibbing Elks Lodge. Allison follows outgoing Chair Kelle Degnan.

Allison is president/CEO of Minnesota Twist Drill of Chisholm. He's been on the Chamber board since 2006. Along with partners, he co-owns Triumph Twist Drill in Hibbing, Northland Drill of Chisholm, General Waste in Keewatin and Laurentian Land Co./ Marshview Meadows, a real estate development, in Hibbing.



Allison graduated from Hibbing High School, then went on to St. Cloud State University where he earned a degree in engineering technology. He then spent six years working in the Twin Cities while continuing his education at St. Cloud State University. In 1990, he returned to Hibbing.

When first asked to join the Chamber Board, Allison admits he was a bit leery about saying yes because of the time commitment. "However, after giving it some thought, I figured as a business owner in this community, how could I not?" he said during a speech Friday. "My rational was this: I love this community ... and I cannot think of a better place to raise a family and promote a career."

Allison describes himself as a thinker and a man of few words — with one exception. "When it comes to Hibbing, I cannot talk enough about the people, the school system, the friends I have and the friends I have not met yet and the entrepreneurial spirit ...," he said.

Then he questioned how could he not help give back in times when the community is in need. "It sickens me to see empty buildings downtown and to watch a personal friend lose his clothing business due to the economy. It hurt to see businesses like Reptron Manufacturing and Noble Industries close. It concerns me deeply to know there are drugs in our schools," he said. "And I wonder why we see other communities getting hotels and restaurants when we are not. Or why did a community to the west get this and community to the east get that. ... After all Hibbing is the heart and soul of the Iron Range."

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Allison said it's time to quit lamenting and asking "why," and instead start asking "how." He's asking business persons and community members to "put on that entrepreneurial hat and think about how we can make Hibbing a destination."

He envisions a place where business people and tourists alike want to visit and return to, and where kids can stay or return after college and secure meaningful, prosperous jobs. "It's really up to us," he added. "We are the people that can make Hibbing the future for our kids. We have the business smarts and the wherewithal to make Hibbing a destination and grow our community."

Allison said he'll be seeking input on how to make positive changes and what people are willing to do to help get there during his tenure as chair. "I ask you to please respond so we can build a brighter future together," he told the crowd. "... My hope is that all of us will pick up the mantle as volunteer leaders to do more."

In addition to his work with the Chamber, Allison is active on numerous locals board and committees, including: Central Iron Range Sanitary Sewer District (CIRSSD), chair of Central Iron Range Initiative (CIRI) and board member of Occupational Development Center (ODC). He is also president of Hibbing Youth Hockey Association and vice-president of Hibbing Little League. He was also a founding member and past president of the Northern Minnesota Builders Association.

Allison is a Hibbing native and is married to the former Laurie Sullivan, also originally from Hibbing. They have three boys: AJ, 15, Ben, 13, and Joe, 8. Away from work, he enjoys coaching his sons in baseball, football and hockey. He also likes to hunt and fish. Most of all, he loves spending time with his family at Dewey Lake.



Current Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce initiatives as outlined by Scott Allison during his speech:

- The Chamber has and continues to be a leader in the effort bring Essar Steel to our area, including having hosted events to welcome the people of India and other communities, given personal tours of our town and school, and have welcomed them into their homes. This effort continues daily.
- The Chamber "helped to apply just a little bit of pressure" when Detroit Diesel Remanufacturing/DMR Electronics was looking for help expanding. That resulted in the addition of 10 new jobs in the fourth quarter of 2010, with a capital investment allowing the retention of 15 DMR will incrementally add additional resources in 2011 and is targeting revenue growth of \$3 million.
- The Chamber is leading the effort for a commercial weatherization program that could help local, especially downtown businesses, with energy — one of their largest expenses.
- The Chamber works with the Minnesota Chamber to help represent the area at the legislature by fighting anti-business or anti-jobs bills and promoting bills that are positive for business or for our region. The Chamber's Government Affairs committee takes a formal position on all legislation deemed to be of interest to business.
- The Chamber helped organize delegations to travel to the state capitol for hearings on businesses, such as Essar and PolyMet. The Chamber has also organized letter writing campaigns and sent important calls to action out to Chamber members for response.
- The Chamber holds candidate forums, and co-hosts the mayor's annual State of the City address.
- The Chamber also assists tourists and new residents in finding community resources; helps new business people find customers and friends and hangs flowers downtown.

**Article compliments of the Hibbing Daily Tribune. Kelly Grinsteiner can be reached at [kgrinsteiner@hibbingdailytribune.net](mailto:kgrinsteiner@hibbingdailytribune.net).**



## ***BUSINESS OF THE YEAR***

*Company named first Business of the Year*

**by Kelly Grinsteiner  
Assistant Editor**

**Hibbing Daily Tribune**

Published: Sunday, February 6, 2011 6:05 AM CST

HIBBING — A nearly 80-year-old, Hibbing-based construction company that's built its reputation on quality work done by quality employees has been named the first recipient of the Hibbing Business of the Year Award. The award was presented to Max Gray Construction, Inc., in front of a large crowd Friday during the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce's 106th annual dinner and auction at the Hibbing Elks Lodge.

Jim Erickson, president of Max Gray, said the honor was unexpected. "It's a great honor to the company and the employees of the company," he said. "That's the emphasis — a successful company is not better than its employees, and we have excellent employees here at Max Gray."

Lory Fedo, Chamber president and CEO, said Max Gray was chosen by the committee over several other companies and is a fitting business to set the tone for the award. "(Max Gray) is an excellent example of what we're looking for, and they really have not received that much recognition both in terms of the community and within their particular type of business," she said. "It's a good representation of a Hibbing business that has a good reputation throughout this region and in its business sector."

The Business of the Year is an offshoot of the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce's prestigious Annual Lifetime Achievement Award. However, instead of honoring an individual, this award honors an entire business — its employees, managers, owners and history. "This will allow organizations with multiple owners, managers or management teams to be eligible for this prestigious recognition," Fedo said.

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No matter where one drives in Hibbing, it's nearly impossible not to bypass a building that was constructed, expanded or renovated by employees of Max Gray. "Yeah, we do have a lot of buildings in town," acknowledged Erickson, who currently co-owns the company with Jim Abrahamson, vice president of construction, and Bill Lowry, vice president of finances. "And that's gone on over many years."



Max Gray Lumber Company was incorporated and founded here in Hibbing in the 1930s by entrepreneur Max Gray. The business began as a lumber yard and residential home builder. "In fact, Graysher Addition was built by and named after Max Gray," noted Erickson. "Max Gray Lumber developed Highland Park in the 1960s." In the mid-1940s, A.R. "Bob" Erickson joined the company. He started there as a coal shoveler and worked his way up to office manager for Max Gray after returning from World War II. "He (Bob) was a hero," said Jim Erickson of his father. "He fought in the battle of Anzio, was a POW in Germany and received the Purple Heart."

Bob, with the support of his wife, Evelyn, and two other employees purchased the company from Max Gray in the early 1960s. He bought the others out within two years and became sole owner. During this time, the company shifted its efforts to commercial and light industrial construction. In 1964, Max Gray Lumber and

Construction built its last home. It became Bob and Evelyn's home for 40 years until Bob's death in 2004. Evelyn still lives in that home today. Bob's operation of Max Gray Construction during the taconite boom was quite successful. During the downturn of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the company continued operations in a difficult market.

In the early 1980s, Bob's sons, Jim and Scott Erickson, began working summers as laborers for the company and by 1983 had assumed control of the company after returning from college. "Both of us had many summers of hands-on experience working as laborers on various projects across the Range," Jim said. When his sons assumed control of the company, Bob became the part-time bookkeeper. Also working there at the time was longtime employee Rita Salmi and George Fischer, who retired in 1995 after more than 50 years with the company.

"There were only two jobs on the books at that time," Jim recalled. With the support and help of many fine employees, like George Penoncello, John Potter and JoAnne Rupright, the Erickson brothers built the company up. In 1987, they expanded the company by adding another base of operation in Duluth, which expanded their market geographically to now include Duluth and

# Annual Dinner-----

northwestern Wisconsin. A year later, the brothers purchased the current location of the offices at 2501 5th Ave. W. — the original location of Max Gray Lumber Company’s warehouses, according to Jim. By 1997, the company had grown in size and prominence to become a preferred contractor in the Duluth, northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin areas. That same year, Scott left the company to pursue other ventures, and Jim Erickson became president and sole owner of Max Gray Construction, Inc.

The turn of the century brought over \$20 million in work — a company milestone credited to Max Gray’s straightforward method of doing business.

In 2002, Jim Abrahamson was named vice president of construction and Bill Lowry became vice president of finances with both men becoming company shareholders. They also joined the board of directors.

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Today Max Gray’s primary market remains Northeastern Minnesota and Northwestern Wisconsin. Jim said they continue to expand their reach to the Twin Cities, Western Minnesota and now South Dakota. The company employs up to 100 employees annually, as well as numerous local subcontractors and their employees throughout the region. Over past several years, the company has averaged an annual construction volume of \$25 million, according to Erickson. There are several keys to the company’s success, he said. They include the high caliber and dedication of employees; a strong, hard work ethic; and high quality of work. Aiming to please clients has also helped the company stay competitive, he added.

Erickson acknowledged that business has been slower than normal over the past couple of years, but said that is a trend nationwide. He opined that the economy here on the Range is slightly better than other markets. “We’ve seen a lot of general contractors up here from the Twin Cities, other areas of the state and even out of state,” he said. “That made things more competitive, but we’ve been able to hold our own and remain competitive. I’d say we’ve done pretty well in this market.”

The Hibbing Area Business of the Year award is given for:

- Demonstrated growth and stability
- Excellence and/or innovation in their field
- Dedication and service to the community
- Longevity of business and loyalty to employees
- Special contributions of leadership and mentoring of others
- Support and promotion of the region, chamber and business community.



A partial list of past and present notable projects in the Hibbing area done by Max Gray, Inc.:

- Hibbing High School: The new gym and pool addition, in addition to a number of other renovation projects. Max Gray is the current contractor in the final stages of the school’s Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) projects, which total around \$6 million.
- Slumberland
- The new ambulatory care and emergency department addition at Fairview University Medical Center- Mesabi (UMCM).
- Walgreen’s
- Fairview Plaza (renovation of former ODC and DMV)
- Local strip malls Hibbing Marketplace and Westside Commons
- Realife Cooperative of Hibbing
- Additions and renovations to Blessed Sacrament and Assumption School
- HillCrest Adams, HillCrest Alice and HillCrest Assisted-Living in Nashwauk
- Expansion of Hibbing Community College’s north campus for purposes of centralization.
- Barr Engineering (renovation of former HCC south campus)
- Security State Bank (original building, plus additions and recent renovation)
- The Hibbing Park Hotel (known then as the Kahler) and Hibbing Business Center



**Article compliments of the Hibbing Daily Tribune. Kelly Grinsteinner can be reached at [kgrinsteinner@hibbingdailytribune.net](mailto:kgrinsteinner@hibbingdailytribune.net).**

## Cravaack Addresses Chamber

*Focusing on jobs, deficit reduction*

by Anna Kurth  
Staff Writer

Hibbing Daily Tribune

Published: Tuesday, February 8, 2011 6:06 AM CST



HIBBING — U.S. Rep. Chip Cravaack applauded small business owners while disparaging Washington for deficits and stifling job creation during his address at the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce’s 106th annual dinner and auction Friday. “I know that it’s been kind of tough out there,” he said. “We have tough economic times but you all serve as an example of how to operate businesses and even thrive in the current challenging environment.”

The address before the packed room of local businessmen and women was Cravaack’s first visit to a Chamber event since taking office this January.

Cravaack is a 24-year Navy veteran who worked as a Northwest Airlines pilot after leaving the service. He holds a bachelor degree from the U.S. Naval Academy and a Master’s in Education from the University of West Florida. In Congress, Cravaack serves on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Homeland Security Committee. He said it was government debt, deficits, red tape and high unemployment rates that inspired him to run for office. “I thought we needed to head in a much different direction. We are the United States of America, we can and should be doing better,” he said.

Budget estimates released last week project a \$1.5 trillion deficit for this budget year. Deficit spending has topped \$3 trillion combined for the past two years, and the total U.S. deficit is more than \$14 trillion, Cravaack said. The debt equates to \$45,000 for every person living in the country or \$122,000 per household. “Spending like this is simply unsustainable, and it’s time to cut up Washington’s credit card,” he said.

Cravaack said he proposes rescinding what remains of the stimulus package and cutting out Medicare and Earned Income Tax errors, which he estimates could save a combined \$100 billion. “Much of what we need to do right now to right our fiscal ship will require hard work and some serious soul searching about America’s priorities, but we must undertake these reforms or we will lose the America that we all grew up in,” he said. Small businesses also can do its part in helping the American economy by continuing to create jobs. “Businesses like yourselves are responsible for seven out of every 10 jobs created in this country,” he said. Congress can assist small business owners in job creation by ending uncertainty about taxes and eliminating “unnecessary, burdensome regulatory policy,” he said.

Cravaack said he’s also trying to help create jobs in mining in the Eighth District. The congressman said he’s working with officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers to promote proposed projects in the district. “We have vast natural resources, and the potential for highly skilled, high paying jobs ... here in Minnesota,” Cravaack said. “My hope in going forward is that I will find willing partners in those agencies who like me are focused both on economic growth and conservation.”

**Article compliments of the Hibbing Daily Tribune. Anna Kurth can be reached at [akurth@hibbingdailytribune.net](mailto:akurth@hibbingdailytribune.net)**



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## Locals honored for their work with the Chamber

Hibbing Daily Tribune

Published: Sunday, February 6, 2011 6:05 AM CST

HIBBING — The efforts of several volunteers within the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce’s powerful network were honored with awards Friday during the Chamber’s 106th annual dinner and auction held at the Hibbing Elks Lodge.

### Business Education Partnership: Barr Engineering and Express Print

This fourth annual Business Education Partnership Award went to Barr Engineering and Express Print — two worthy entities in the community that have networked with education for the betterment of the students as well as the community.

This award is given by the Hibbing Chamber of Commerce and the Hibbing Public School District to cooperating businesses that meet the criteria. Mike Finco, principal of Hibbing High School Board, presented the honorary plaques, which were designed by a team of students and teachers at Hibbing High School. “The recipients of this award have provided professional guidance and support to both students and instructors enabling our district to provide a quality education,” he said.

Barr Engineering was honored for the company’s numerous contributions to the promotion of engineering careers, including:

- Facilitating the annual Engineering Mentoring session.
- Having representatives regularly attend the Engineering Advisory Committee meeting.
- Providing financial support last year to Hibbing High School’s pre-engineering class.
- Providing logistical, planning and financial support for the Bus-Engineering computational facility.
- Supporting engineering job-shadow students.
- CEO support for Hibbing High School’s pre-engineering mission
- Being a faithful participant in the Math Career Days at Hibbing High School over the past six years.
- Being instrumental as well as integral part of developing the Engineering Cool program at the elementary level.

“Without the continued support from Barr, we would be unable to maintain high-quality, relevant and timely programming,” said Carl Sandness, Hibbing High School pre-engineering instructor. “HCC’s Bob Zbikowski and I have personally to provide our students with the best pre-engineering preparation opportunities possible.”

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At Express Print One Ltd., Jeff Dougherty and his staff were recognized for providing technical assistance and direction to the high school’s graphic design students and instructor, which Finco said “enhance students’ ‘real world’ experience” of this discipline.

This has been accomplished through:

- Making classroom presentations.
- Assisting students in fine-tuning projects prior to professional printing.
- Partnering with advanced students in the creation of posters used by teachers as well as with two different brochure projects.
- Guiding students in the design process as well giving feedback in the final stages of pre-press work.
- Being a resource for the instructor by providing technical assistance in software instruction.
- Opening their business to accommodate field trips for graphic design classes.

Also, Renee Anderson of Express Print One serves on the Business Education Partnership Committee, which advises all the Career & Technical Programs in the school district. We thank you both for your commitment to today’s youth,” Finco concluded.



## **Range Young Professional: Brian Grzybowski**

This year's honor goes to Brian Grzybowski, owner of Prodigy Real Estate in Hibbing. Grzybowski borne and organized the "Average Joe Golf Tournament" for the members of the Range Young Professionals. "It was a great success, and he did an amazing job," said Chamber President/CEO Lory Fedo, while adding that the event raised "nearly \$2,500. "And everyone had a good time." Grzybowski also raised \$30,000 for the Kiwanis Little Ones Indoor Park at the Hibbing Public Library. "We are truly fortunate to have a go getter like Brian in our community," Fedo said. Grzybowski said he became a Chamber member to meet and support the other local businesses in town, and adds that his membership has had a positive effect on his business through contacts made. "The biggest strength of the Chamber is its ability to bring the local businesses together to support each other and to form relationships for the enhancement of the entire group," he noted. "It is so valuable to have a large group of people who are working toward the promotion of Hibbing and the businesses we have to offer."



## **Ambassador of the Year: J.V. Wiener**

Each year the Ambassadors elect the Ambassador who has done the most for their group. And this year's recipient is, at least, a three-peat. J.V. Wiener once again took the honor. "(She) schedules all of the Ambassador ribbon cuttings and special projects and does a fantastic job," Fedo said. Wiener has been described as "the backbone of the Chamber Ambassadors" and a venerable champion of the Chamber of Commerce and its aim for years. She has served the Chamber since 1984. Her behind-the-scenes work has contributed to the success of the organization and the fun had at events and activities. "(She's) a person who can see what others cannot see; who can feel what most do not feel," Fedo said. "... She doesn't think of herself as a volunteer, but a Chamber member in the fullest sense. And we thank her for her tireless work."



## **Outstanding Leadership Award: Kelly Grinsteinner**

The Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce Leadership Committee each year selects one graduate to be honored for exemplary leadership. This year the group chose Kelly Grinsteinner, assistant editor at the Hibbing Daily Tribune, out of more than 400 who have gone through the program. Grinsteinner participated in the Leadership training in 2005. "It's not easy for a reporter to be involved due to their crazy work schedule ... and yet Kelly is, and she promptly responds to all of us when we call about projects or stories," Fedo said. A native of Inver Grove Heights, Minn., Grinsteinner has made Hibbing home since 1999. She is a member of the Hibbing Healthy Lifestyles Coalition. Through her volunteer work, Grinsteinner has been the chief organizer for the Fit City event, has promoted healthy menu selections at local restaurants and she has helped collect and distribute information on health and wellness in the newspaper. "She believes that it is important to combat childhood obesity and diseases that result (from obesity)," Fedo said. She was presented with a check of \$250 to give to the charity of her choice. "Thank you Kelly for all you have done and ... congratulations," Fedo said.



**Article compliments of the Hibbing Daily Tribune.** To read this story and comment on it online go to [www.hibbingmn.com](http://www.hibbingmn.com).

Annual Dinner-----

# Thank you to all of our Annual Dinner Sponsors:



Graphic compliments of Nick Signs

*We couldn't have done the Annual Dinner without our volunteers!*

*Shari Erickson*

*Pat Ives*

*Marci Knight*

*Kacey Donahue*

*Kimberly Schlecht*

*Marcy Anderson*

*Celia Cameron*

*Kelle Degnan*

*Brenda Fagan*

*Marco Fedo*

*Travis King*

*Carrie Manner*

*Matt Miller*

*Andrea Raiber*

*Jeremy Rodorigo*

*Carrie Whitman*

*Special thanks to:*

*The Hibbing Elks, Elks Staff & Chef Jack Soderstrom  
for the food, beverages and hospitality*

*Kiddy Karousel & Range Center  
for the Elegant Dessert Bar*

*Express Print One  
for producing all of our printed materials.*



## March 2011

Leadership Committee	01	8:00AM, Sportsmen's
MN Chamber Conference Call Series	04	7:30AM, Chamber Office
Executive Committee Meeting	07	Noon, US Bank boardroom
Women's Innovative Network Meeting	08	4:00PM, Jimmy's
Commercial Weatherization Meeting	09	8:30AM, Chamber office
Board of Directors Meeting	14	11:30AM, TBD
Ambassadors Meeting	15	Noon, Country Kitchen
Range Young Professionals	16	Noon, Sammy's
BR & E Meeting	17	7:45AM, Chamber office
MN Chamber Conference Call Series	18	7:30AM, Chamber office
Government Affairs meeting	21	Noon, Country Kitchen
Pennies For Play Meeting	28	1:30PM, TBD

## Your 2011 Chamber Leaders

### Chair of the Board

Scott Allison

*Minnesota Twist Drill*

### First Vice Chair

Rally Hess

*Hibbing Taconite*

### Treasurer

Mark Gardeski

*Security State Bank*

### Past Chair of the Board

Kelle Degnan

*Edward Jones Investments*

Chris Bergum

*Triumph Twist Drill*

Deb Boardman

*Fairview Range*

Joe Bonelli

*Airgas*

Kelly Bougalis

*Hibbing Plumbing*

Danette Brandstrom

*Fairview UCMC*

Roberta Collins

*Advantage Billing*

Joan Cotton

*1st Realty Rangewide*

Rachel Delich-Sullivan

*Prebich Law Office*

Shaun Germolus

*Range Regional Airport*

Brian Grzybowski

*Prodigy Real Estate*

Jason Janisch

*Jasper Engineering*

Greg Lee

*US Bank*

Bill Lowry

*Max Gray Construction*

Wanda Moeller

*Hibbing Daily Tribune*

Camille Nasi

*Liquor Cabinet*

Kristen Olinske

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