

# Two longtime Lee County business leaders to be honored

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Two Lee County business standouts will be honored tonight for reaching beyond their own organizations to offer community leadership.

Jim Nathan, chief executive officer of the Lee Memorial Health System, and Tom Uhler, founding principal of Uhler and Vertich Financial Planners, will be inducted as laureates in the Lee County Business Hall of Fame by Junior Achievement of Southwest Florida.

This year's honorees demonstrate the impact that business people can have on a community at large, said Victoria Stephan, Junior Achievement president.

"They have not just made business decisions, they have made human decisions," Stephan said. "They have changed lives."

The business laureate program dates back to 1987. Each winner is selected from a list of finalists by an advisory board and a group that includes past honorees.

Tonight's event - at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Golf & Spa Resort in Estero - ties together all of Junior Achievement's activities, Stephan said.

About 60 students from Lee schools - from third grade through high school - who have participated in the group's educational programs - will be among the 500 people at the event.

In the years ahead, the new laureates will take their place helping students in those programs.

"They are part of a large number of business leaders in the county who are very interested in our children," Stephan said.

About the honorees:

## **Jim Nathan says flexibility is vital**

Nathan, 63, has been associated with health care in Southwest Florida since he moved to Lee County in 1975 to begin an administrative residency at Lee Memorial Hospital.

By the end of 1981, he was the CEO of the hospital, which has grown into a system of hospitals, outpatient centers and physician group practices that employ 8,600 people.

Through it all, Nathan said he has strived to remember his first encounter with health care as a boy in Cincinnati, when his father was hospitalized for almost two years. To see his father, the young boy had to climb a tree to peek into a second-story window.

“There is no question that I learned a lot at that time, but most importantly, I learned there is a difference between the art of medicine and the science of medicine,” Nathan said.

Today, the system’s hospitals strive to be welcoming and comforting to both patients and their families, he said.

“When we truly connect with the family and the patient, the result is far better care,” he said.

Nathan left Lee Memorial for about three years starting in 1997 to serve as a leadership consultant and play a role in national health care reform.

While he didn’t accomplish every one of his goals, he hopes young people can take a lesson from the effort.

“I have had to reinvent myself many times over the years,” Nathan said. “We all have to learn how to learn and learn to be flexible.”

Nathan also serves as a board member for Florida Gulf Coast University Foundation, The Foundation for Lee County Public Schools, American Heart Association of Lee County, Southwest Florida Community Foundation, Coalition for a Drug-Free Lee County and The American Red Cross of Lee County.

### **Tom Uhler behind charities, area firm**

Uhler, 67, has been working to help clients get the most out of their finances since he came to Southwest Florida in 1976.

As the founder of his independent firm specializing in comprehensive estate, retirement and investment planning, Uhler has also reached out to local charities to help them establish planned giving efforts.

It’s a stretch from the biology degree he earned as a young man in Pennsylvania, but once he started working in the financial sector, Uhler said he knew he had found his profession.

“It just clicked with me right away,” he said.

However, his profession is just one area of interest for Uhler, who also founded The Wine Merchant in Fort Myers, is a member of the Society of Wine Educators and a patron of the local performing arts.

“I think a lot of the most successful people I know have a tremendous sense of curiosity and get interested in a lot of things,” Uhler said. “I think I would be bored to death if I had to focus on just one thing.”

He said he encourages everyone to explore their interests and see where they lead. “It opens your mind and helps you think outside the box for your other activities,” he said.

A resident of Sanibel Island since 1977, Uhler has served on the boards of numerous organizations such as the Good Neighbor Community Foundation of Sanibel-Captiva, the Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra and Chorus Association, United Way of Lee County and the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation.

He is a life member of the National Eagle Scout Association, a former Cubmaster and serves on the Council Executive Board and Endowment Investment Committee of the Southwest Florida Council of the Boy Scouts of America.