

New president enjoys sweet taste of success

By Mary Klomic
staff writer

The doorbell at the Awrey home in Farmington Hills plays "Auld Lang Syne" when visitors stop by.

Robert and Betty Jean Awrey have good reason to celebrate the new year. Awrey Bakeries — of which Robert is board chairman and Betty Jean is director of public relations — appears headed for continued success.

But 1986 marks another milestone for the Awrey family. It's the year Betty Jean will serve as president of the Livonia Chamber of Commerce, the first woman to do so.

"I consider it a great challenge," Awrey said, from her sunny, plant-filled living room. "I'm kind of in love with the city of Livonia — the business people, political people. It's a vibrant community. There are a lot of expansion plans, especially in the I-275 corridor."

Awrey's immediate goal as president is to increase membership. She said membership is 1,100, a figure she would like to see changed to 1,300 or 1,400.

"Some will say, 'What's in it for me?'" Awrey said. "It brings businesspeople together. We have a strong legislative base. As a whole, the membership could do well for each and every business. Some of the problems that will arise up in Lansing, one individual would take a very long time to work to

change). As a group, we put some thrust behind it."

ALTHOUGH THE Awreys live in Farmington Hills, "our heart and soul is over there (in Livonia)," Awrey said. "The schools are fabulous, the business is there."

Awrey has been on a variety of boards of directors, that of the chamber of commerce (for five years), the Livonia Family Y (four years), the Livonia Heart Fund (two years) and the first woman's chair in Detroit of the Franklin M. Loew World Center for Livonia Chamber of Commerce, the first woman to do so.

A member of the president's cabinet at Madonna College, Awrey was vice chair of fund raising for five years. She was secretary of the Schoolcraft College Foundation Board, on the Livonia Prayer Breakfast Committee and on the executive board of the Boy Scouts.

She was appointed to the Wayne County Private Industry Council, to a term that will expire July 31, 1987.

HOW DOES she find the time for so many projects and activities?

"Lord knows. I don't know," she answered with a laugh. "Some of the meetings are quietly, some do most months. The busy person has the time. I still clean every room in this house," Awrey said. "I get a tremendous satisfaction out of my house. Usually businessmen can't do both."

The Awreys live in Livonia for 11

years before building their Farmington Hills house five years ago. The view from the large living room windows includes a creek, sloping hills and trees. The basement features a sauna.

Today, the Awreys' two youngest children, ages 19 and 13, are still at home. There are four other children, ages 33, 30, 28 and 22.

"Boy, is it fun at holiday time!" Awrey said.

BORN IN Detroit, Awrey came to work for Awrey Bakeries right from high school. She has worked at Awrey Bakeries for 23 years — 11 of them as executive secretary, seven of them in retail sales, managing and supervising the Awrey Thrift Store.

Awrey Bakeries officially opened in Livonia in 1967. It's strategically located near railroad tracks and expressways, which the company uses to bring in supplies and ship out frozen products to all 50 states. It now employs 600 workers, 100 more than the previous year.

The company is considering opening a plant in Alabama, but "We're (the Livonia facility) is going to stay right here," Awrey said.

Awrey is proud of the bakery's activities marking its 75th anniversary last year, which she organized. These included festivities at Roma Hall and Boblo for employees, and an open house for media and suppliers. Awrey and her husband also handed out

Christmas gifts to employees at every shift.

FOR RECREATION, Awrey likes to read, travel (to the Caribbean this year, to Australia the next), golf, play bridge and see good movies.

"I really feel very fortunate," she said. "Your time here is so very short. You want to soak up as much as you can. Live for today, you can't live in the past."

Awrey is often asked if she'll run for office, but she isn't interested in politics, she said.

"I would never run for office," Awrey said. "It's good to be behind the scenes. Let someone else stick their neck out. I'd just tell 'em like it is the first time around. I wouldn't be elected the second time."

MEETING DIFFERENT people is what Awrey likes best about her activities.

"All the different boards I'm on, it's so interesting to see how they operate," she said.

There are times when Awrey won't let her husband bring home any bakery products because they're too tempting when she wants to work her weight.

"The only thing I can't do is cook. I hate it," she said.

"I don't eat red meat. I do very well on sweets."

Her favorite baked good? "Date nut pastry," she said.

By Awrey's, of course.



Farmington Hills resident Betty Jean Awrey, director of public relations for Awrey Bakeries, is newly elected president of the Livonia Chamber of Commerce — a first for the group.

Experience stressed for older workers

"Experience Works" is the theme of Older Workers Week which is observed annually during the second full week of March.

"It is the second year we have elected to use this theme," says Director Olivia Maynard of the state Office of Services to the Aging (OSA). The message is simple and direct. Older workers have a vast variety of experiences and attributes that make them a valuable asset in the work force. Employers can certainly profit by hiring the older worker.

The 27-year tradition of Older Workers Week, celebrated at both national

and state levels, was initiated by the American Legion. Originally called "Employ the Older Worker Week," it was intended to eliminate age discrimination by employers.

Representatives from several organizations have joined together to coordinate this year's campaign for the March 9-15 statewide celebration which was officially declared Michigan Older Workers Week by Gov. James Blanchard.

The organizations are the Governor's Office for Job Training, the American Association of Retired Persons, Green

Thumb Inc., the Area Agencies on Aging Association of Michigan, the Michigan Department of Labor, the Michigan Employment Security Commission, the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging, the Association National pro Persons Mayores, the National Council on the Elderly, the Urban League, the U.S. Forest Service, the Older Worker Employment Specialists Association of Michigan and the American Legion.

Activities leading up to the week-long event will include the scheduling on radio and television talk shows of

experts in older adult programs and employment.

A poster will be distributed highlighting older workers on the job and announcing a statewide toll-free hotline for assistance in locating jobs and training programs in Michigan communities.

The hotline, 1-800-JOB HIRE, will be staffed by older workers participating in the Senior Community Service Employment Program under Title V of the Older Americans Act.

Older workers are generally defined as persons age 55 and older who are willing and able to work.

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