

'You've come a long way . . .'

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

You've come a long way, Baby

People at the Oakland County Chamber of Commerce might well be using that phrase of late, referring to the organization's Athena Award, the annual prize commemorating professional excellence among women.

The Athena Award — whose name comes from Greek mythology — is a relatively new development in Oakland County, said Nancy L. Ragsdale, a member of the chamber and spokeswoman for the Athena Award Committee.

But support is strong and growing, Ragsdale said, much like the role of business women in the economy of Oakland County.

"We have about two dozen candidates — including at least three men

— and we have more than a week" before the close of nominations, said Ragsdale, account representative in marketing at Manpower Temporary Services Inc.

Men may be nominated who have been particularly supportive of women in business.

The chamber will present its third Athena on Jan. 31 during its annual dinner at the Troy Marriott Hotel.

Previous winners are Noreen Keating, executive director of the Pontiac Area Lighthouse, and Grace E. Smith, former director of continuing professional education at Walsh College.

THE FIRST EVER Athena Award was presented in Lansing in 1982, as the Regional Chamber of Commerce in the capital city looked for some way to recognize outstanding business women and the emerging role of women in the community.

The award has since become part of a national program, with Athena — the daughter of Zeus — symbolizing the virtues of courage, wisdom and strength, all qualities needed by today's business woman.

The emergence of women in Oakland County might well be symbolized in Pamela M. Berklich, the first woman in the chamber's 80-year history to serve as chairman of the chamber's board of directors.

THE CHAMBER doesn't keep statistics on the number of women among its 1,000 members, said Berklich, who has been active in it for about five years.

"But the number is growing," she said.

Berklich, area manager for the automotive division of Manpower Temporary Services, said she is convinced Oakland County will reflect the trend projected on a national ba-

sis on the number of women entrepreneurs.

THAT TREND calls for women to own 50 percent of all businesses by the year 2000, Berklich said, with the chamber's membership changing accordingly.

The Athena Award is one way the chamber is recognizing that change. The deadline for nominating a man or woman for the Athena Award is Friday, Nov. 16. Entry forms can be obtained through the chamber, at 683-4747 or 644-1229.

This year's selection committee is Kenneth Graham, resident comptroller of the General Motors BOC assembly plant in Orion, Township; Richard Thompson, Oakland County prosecutor; Jessica R. Cooper, Oakland County Circuit Judge; Don Huss, director of public affairs for the General Motors Truck and Bus Group; and Jeffrey Barry, president of Walsh College.



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