

WEB EXCLUSIVE MONDAY 2 41 PM

GVSU earns Newsmaker of the Year honors

By Business Journal Staff

Grand Valley State University has a measurable track record when it comes to long-term economic development.

And its future provides a large root system for growing the regional economy.

GVSU is about to turn 50 but still is growing like a precocious child of the digital age, which is why it earned this year's Grand Rapids Business Journal Newsmaker of the Year award.

"Grand Valley may be the most important asset that West Michigan has for a successful future economy, so the fact that they are successful and growing here is terrific," said Lou Glazer, president of Michigan Future Inc. and one of the analysts asked for commentary for this year's award winner.

GVSU was honored during a Jan. 23 luncheon of the Economic Club of Grand Rapids at the JW Marriott. The editorial board of the Business Journal selected it from 10 finalists that gave long-term economic gains to the region in 2011.

"All 10 will have continued impact on the future of this community. Selecting one was a difficult process. And that bodes well for West Michigan," said Carole Valade, editor of the Business Journal.

Gayle Davis, provost and vice president of academic affairs at GVSU, accepted the award.

"All the finalists have contributed so much to our region and we would like to thank them all," she said. "We have always shared our success with the whole community. Thank you to all of you who have supported us over the years."

The winner is kept secret until the announcement is made during the luncheon.



ALISSA LANE

Gayle Davis, provost and vice president of academic affairs at Grand Valley State University, accepts a framed copy of a front page recognizing GVSU as the Newsmaker of the Year during today's luncheon of the Economic Club of Grand Rapids at the JW Marriott.

“This is the 20th time the Grand Rapids Business Journal has presented its Newsmaker of the Year,” said John Zwarenstejn, publisher. “Richard DeVos was our first recipient in 1993 for efforts accomplished in 1992, and every year since we have continued to find outstanding examples of visionary entrepreneurship and economic leadership in the Grand Rapids-West Michigan region. The annual decision-making process in selecting a winner from 10 equally qualified and justifiable newsmaker candidates is difficult and competitive. Yet it does demonstrate, clearly, why the region continues to lead the way in Michigan. We seem blessed with an inexhaustible supply of visionaries and risk-taking entrepreneurs, a great testament to the future of the region.

“A case was made this year for each of our 10 finalists. This year’s winner, Grand Valley State University, earned its way to the top by virtue of its numerous projects in the region, its long-term vision, and for being such a major asset to the region on multiple levels.”

In May, GVSU began construction of the high-tech Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons on the Allendale campus, scheduled to open in May 2013. The \$65 million, 150,000-square-foot building is intended to qualify for the highest LEED certification and will contain about 700,000 books.

According to the architect, SHW Group, the Pew Library will be “a model for the new 21st-century digital learning environment.” Lee Van Orsdel, dean of GVSU libraries, describes it as “an information knowledge market,” the equivalent of an “academic mall.” To help students improve their skills in writing and research, the library will hire students for part-time positions and train them in the intricacies of in-depth online research so they can help other students find and evaluate the best information available on the Internet.

The Pew Library will be unique among GVSU facilities in design and mechanical elements. It will have an HVAC system that distributes heated or cooled air under the floor, a system originally developed for mainframe computer rooms. The building has an energy-efficient “skin,” and its windows are triple-paned and shaded where facing direct sunlight to prevent heat buildup in the warm months.

Expanding the region’s knowledge base while also creating jobs tipped the scales in GVSU’s favor, said Glazer.

“People tend to underestimate the importance of higher education as major employers themselves,” he said. “So the fact that it’s growing is an important part of the economy.”

Glazer also pointed out that “staying ahead of the curve” in terms of being able to provide a quality, technical-based education will produce long-term dividends.

“They are of major importance for preparing a future work force for the region,” he said.

Also in May, GVSU broke ground for the L. William Seidman Center, augmenting its Seidman College of Business, a process that began with a gift from the school’s namesake, William “Bill” Seidman. The facility, located along the Grand River and Fulton Street in downtown, will

include a center for entrepreneurial study — a school of choice for growing numbers of students and one heartily welcomed by business leaders here and across the country.

Doug Rothwell, president and CEO of Detroit-based Business Leaders for Michigan and another of the Newsmaker commentators, said GVSU's willingness to expand both its Allendale campus and its Grand Rapids facilities indicates the university is in it for the long run.

“Grand Valley is a big reason why Grand Rapids has had such a successful redevelopment story,” Rothwell said. “And the more they continue to build facilities here is really a great testament to that. They are trying to reach out to the community as a whole, not just kind of stay on the Allendale campus, which many universities might do.”

As evidence of that commitment, Rothwell pointed to the GVSU board of trustees' decision Nov. 4 to purchase more land in downtown Grand Rapids where the university can eventually expand its health care programs. The 1.6-acre site is adjacent to the university's Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences on the Medical Mile on Michigan Street. It was assembled by Rockford Development Group, which offered to sell the property to the university for \$3.25 million.

“In this case, I think they feel some real ownership in the community development and are a great part of the community's success,” he said.

GVSU is the region's leading provider of health care workers, with 5,000 students currently in its health care programs. The Center for Health Sciences, opened in 2003, is filled to capacity, and the university needs additional laboratories and classrooms to accommodate enrollment demand.

The students and professionals attracted to GVSU programs will continue to have a positive economic impact on the city, Glazer said.

“They're an important part of the asset base to attracting people and development to downtown,” he said.

Grand Valley, which can boast of retaining approximately 80 percent of its graduates in the West Michigan work force, has become an important part of the region's economy.

“We are happy to be literally changing the landscape in these small ways that could change our future,” Davis said.