



Tim VanGundy, left, and Stevie Garrett get their food from Brooke Winegardner, center, Jan. 15 at Buffalo Wild Wings. JESS LANNING/EAGLE-GAZETTE



# Wings. Sports. Beer. ... and community service

**By C.J. Cross**

Eagle-Gazette correspondent

LANCASTER — A local restaurant franchise known as much for its food as for community service is the 2013 Lancaster Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce Business of the Year in the 25+ Employees category.

Larry Tipton owns Lancaster Wings/Buffalo Wild Wings, 1283 North Memorial Drive. He opened that restaurant Oct. 26, 1999. He also owns franchises in Reynoldsburg, Canal Winchester, Heath, Mount Vernon, Athens and two in Arizona.

Buffalo Wild Wings began in 1982 in Columbus. Now headquartered in Minneapolis, the compa-

ny has 900 restaurants in 49 states and Canada. Its slogan sums up its three main attractions: Wings. Sports. Beer. Tipton might want to add "community service" to his signage.

"I really was surprised, and then excited because it was like, 'Wow!'" Tipton said about his business earning the Chamber honor. "You suddenly have this sense of accomplishment or something."

Chamber President Travis Markwood said Buffalo Wild Wings has been a great employer in Fairfield County and has invested in improvements to its facilities, "making it a great community asset for families and locals looking to dine out."

"Most importantly, Buffalo Wild Wings continues to support many local causes and charitable organizations," Markwood said. "This is highlighted, of course, in the very popular Eat Wings, Raise Funds, which has helped so many organizations raise funds for their cause."

With Eat Wings, Raise Funds, schools, churches and other organizations receive a percentage of qualifying sales, typically during one evening. Recipients of the revenue are responsible for helping promote the event and get supporters in the door.

"We now have these organizations working with us instead of just waiting in line for a donation

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# Service

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check,” Tipton said of the program. “We could never do that without the community coming in to support us and help us turn around and make a donation.”

At the start of 2012, the Lancaster Fire Department was struggling with numerous financial issues. One funding need going unmet was for emergency medical equipment — especially automatic external defibrillators. The portable medical devices check patients’ heart rhythm and send electric shocks as needed in an attempt to restore normal rhythm.

To help LFD, Tipton offered to have an Eat Wings, Raise Funds event for the entire month of February in conjunction with American Heart Association’s Heart Month. A goal of raising \$2,200 was set in hopes of buying one AED.

Lancaster firefighters served as guest waiters at Buffalo Wild Wings and distrib-

uted fire-related treats to children in attendance.

“The participation from our community was overwhelming to say the least,” said LFD Chief Dave Ward. “The goal was surpassed and the total amount raised for our AED drive was \$4,428 — enough to purchase two AEDs.”

Plans are under way for another such fundraiser in February, Ward said. He called Tipton and Buffalo Wild Wings “a tremendous benefit to the Lancaster Fire Department and to our entire community.”

Jack Greathouse, Lancaster High School principal and host of the local cable television program STUFF, also sees Larry Tipton and Buffalo Wild Wings as major assets to the community.

“A lot of people know and think of Larry as being a keen businessman — which he is — but Larry Tipton is as community-minded a person as anyone I know,” Greathouse said. ... “Larry does the best he can. If he can help people, he does it.”

STUFF is recorded at Buf-



Miranda Boggs, left, and Cory Spires eat Tuesday afternoon, Jan. 15, 2013, at Buffalo Wild Wings. JESS LANNING/EAGLE-GAZETTE

falo Wild Wings. The upbeat program features students and leaders from throughout Fairfield County.

“It’s a joy for us to do it there,” Greathouse said. “They always treat us so good.”

Another example of Tipton’s commitment to the Fairfield County community is the establishment of the Larry E. Tipton Working Student

Scholarship at the Ohio University Lancaster Campus and Pickerington Center. He endowed \$45,000 for the scholarship to Ohio University in July 2012 as part of OU’s \$450 million The Promise Lives campaign.

Tipton also participates in other Buffalo Wild Wings corporate charitable endeavors, including Team Up for Kids, and Dine Out for No Kid

Hungry.

“You name it, and we’ve done an event for them,” Tipton said of local organizations that have benefited. “It’s not necessarily sports. It can be anything that is a worthwhile cause.”

In addition to creating jobs and helping the community through Buffalo Wild Wings, Tipton aided the area through the opening of a Golden Corral franchise in June 2010. He operated the Memorial Drive restaurant for about a year before selling it to someone who has multiple Golden Corral franchises and would be better suited to market the business, Tipton said.

“My goal was to bring a new business to town,” he said. “The jobs still exist, and it’s a great asset to the community.”

That business-savvy thinking and commitment to help others is why Greathouse is not surprised Tipton has earned the Chamber honor.

“Larry really deserves it,” Greathouse said. “He truly is what good community is all about. That’s what Larry Tipton is all about.”