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## **CEO shares life experiences**

### **MELINDA KNOX**

One of Seymour's successful natives made a trip home Thursday to speak to family, friends and community leaders, sharing his stories from the corporate world and relating them to his life experiences in Jackson County.

Mark Emkes, CEO of Bridgestone Americas Holding, was the first speaker for the 2005 Jackson County Leadership Distinguished Speaker Series Thursday at The Elks Lodge, Seymour.

Emkes, a 1971 graduate of Seymour High School, had several kind words to say about his hometown, as well as his former classmates, teachers and coaches in Jackson County.

In his remarks, Emkes told of his world travels with the company. He spent more than 20 years living outside the United States in places such as Mexico and Brazil working on behalf of Bridgestone.

But in all those travels, he said, he took with him lessons he learned in Seymour, including the value of integrity, getting involved with the community, working hard to exceed expectations and maintaining a positive attitude.

"So much of life is attitude and how we handle what comes our way," he said, recalling his try-out for seventh-grade football on the Emerson Elementary School practice field and an incident that led him to a poor attitude toward football when a coach told him he was moving too slowly to start for the team.

However, Emkes said, he changed that attitude around, working to exceed the expectations of others for him, and went out for track, cross country and basketball in later years. He credited coaches John Chastain, Barney Scott and others for helping shape him.

Emkes also recalled his involvement in the Seymour community, and how that allowed him to also become a leader in college. That leadership eventually led him to a scholarship to graduate school.

"That helped me get into college," he said of his community involvement.

Emkes also highlighted the importance of working toward dreams for yourself.

He said that when he started out with the Bridgestone company, he dreamed of someday being CEO, even as he was learning to change tires, and he let people know it.

Some may have laughed, he said, but he was able to accomplish that dream, along with his earlier dreams of playing college basketball and traveling the world.

"You always have to dream," he said.

The speaker series serves as a fund-raiser for Leadership Jackson County's youth leadership program, known as YoJACK. The annual program is for seventh-grade students from all nine Jackson County middle schools and teaches skills in community awareness and leadership.

Ann Windley, Leadership Jackson County executive director, said plans for the next speaker in the series are still being finalized, but that the event will likely take place in June.