

Bittersweet goodbye

By **KATLYNN LANHAM** | **Posted: Thursday, October 6, 2011 2:00 am**

LAKE JACKSON — Though Dow Texas Operations' site leader since 2007, Gary Hockstra has been an integral part of the Brazoria County community since he arrived in 1996, area officials said.

Hockstra announced in September he was leaving Dow Texas Operations to become the company's vice president of manufacturing, engineering and environmental health and safety for the Dow Advanced Materials Division in Philadelphia.

Dow hosted a party Tuesday night to allow the community he has worked in and served with for so many years a chance to say goodbye. Hockstra is transitioning from his job in Texas to his job in Philadelphia this week.

"He's played a key role in many of the great moments at Dow," said Laura Ambrose, site Responsible Care leader at Dow Texas Operations.

Hockstra is responsible for billions of dollars invested in the community, Ambrose said. He has been with the plant through bad times like Hurricane Ike and the struggling economy.

But Tuesday night was about honoring Hockstra and his wife, Ruth, for their service to the community.

Gary Hockstra worked with Brazosport College to build the Dow Academic Center, rode in the BP MS 150, and volunteered with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation, Boy Scouts and the Governor's Committee on Disaster Recovery.

Hockstra was most recognized Tuesday for his dedication to make sure World War II veterans and Dow retirees could see the World War II Memorial in Washington.

"It was Gary's personal passion and perseverance that led to 116 World War II veterans flying in the Dow Honor Flight," Ambrose said.

Hockstra flew on Dow Honor Flight trips this year and last to assure his vision of honoring each World War II veteran was carried through.

"You're the man who did it," said state Rep. Dennis Bonnen,

R-Angleton. "We need to be clear about that."

Bonnen presented Hockstra a plaque certifying him as an honorary Texan by the state of Texas and a plaque from the Texas House of Representatives honoring his work with Dow and the community over the years.

“You’re welcome to come back to Texas whenever you want,” Bonnen said to a loud whistle from Ruth Hockstra.

Lake Jackson Mayor Bob Sipple presented a proclamation from Lake Jackson honoring Hockstra as well.

Area residents also said farewell to Ruth Hockstra, who has been active in the community. Ruth Hockstra has been influential in the Boys and Girls Club, Go Red for Women, Bargain Box and the Junior Service League.

“It’s an incredible, bittersweet occasion for us to be leaving a community like this,” Gary Hockstra said.

The Hockstras raised their kids in Brazoria County and had intended to eventually retire here, he said.

“Everybody here has treated us like family,” Hockstra said. “... being a part of the community here was never a burden, it was an absolute joy.”

Hockstra said he was proud of Dow Texas Operations and what had been accomplished there in his tenure.

“The site will only get bigger and better,” he said.