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Bellevue business community has fun, honors entrepreneurs

by Ken Wall

From Congressman Lee Terry's opening remark of "Bellevue rocks!" to his comment that there are "25 million small businesses in the United States and we are trying to get them all to move to Bellevue," the atmosphere at the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce's inaugural small business award of excellence luncheon was one of light-hearted fun.

The four award winners played along, injecting humor into their acceptance speeches. Even the award committee chairman, Pat Shannon, director of Healthcare Management Solutions, got in on the act, referring to the presenters – Jill Govier, a small business banker at title sponsor Wells Fargo, and Deb Davis, chairman of the Bellevue Chamber – as spokesmodels and joking that since he and



Business partners Dan Zoucha, at left, and Chuck Monico received the award of excellence for a business with one to 15 full-time employees.

egory, with CM's Custom Lawn & Landscape coming out on top. Owner Charles Monico responded by saying it was a great honor to do business in a city that is looking forward and thanked his wife and co-workers.

Other finalists in the category were Bellevue Printing, owned by Dennis and Becky Wilfong; Dicobe Tapes, operated by Dick and Peggy Martin and their son, Jim; Dr. Gregg Hoogeveen and the Hoogeveen Chiropractic Wellness Clinic; and KPE Consulting Engineers, led by Kevin Powers.

Taking the award for companies with 16 to 50 full-time employees was Offutt Collision Repair. The firm is owned by George Rybar, and beat out Amarillo Barbecue, owned by Gordon and Patty Campbell; First Command Financial Planning, represented by Jim Dentinger and Monte Ferguson; and Service Master of Sarpy County, owned by Kevin and Lauri Bousema.

"It's gratifying to have people notice what you do," said Rybar, who paid tribute to his family and co-workers.

Three businesses owned by women vied for honors in the minority-owned business category – Beardmore Chevrolet, owned by Carey Hamilton; John Edwards Salon, owned Cathy Schmalenbach; and McCallie Associates, owned by Jennifer Maassen. Schmalenbach was so elated she had to pause during her speech to wipe the tears from her eyes. But even tears couldn't stop her from cracking a few jokes of her own.

"I love what I do, I love my employ-

ees, and I couldn't be more excited than I am by being a business owner," she said. "If I could do this 24 hours a day, I would, and if I were rich, I would do it for free.

"I just have to thank my husband, Paul, for putting up with all of my different hair colors."

The shy and soft-spoken team of Ryan and Jayme Cronk accepted the award for breaking ground small business as their Cake Specialists was chosen over Courtney and Freddie Bazen's Offutt ATA Black Belt

Academy and Brenda Rynders' Scooter's Java Express.

"We would like to thank the chamber for all of the support they have given us and thank you for all of the support we received from the community as well," Ryan Cronk said. "Jayme and I had a dream that we could open a shop and thanks to Jill Govier, who helped us get a loan, we are really growing."

Davis, thanking the members of the Bellevue business community who attended, said the diversity of the 1,000 small businesses in the city gives the community and the chamber their strength.



George Rybar, owner of Offutt Collision Repair, with his wife, Lynda, received the award of excellence for a business with 16 to 50 full-time employees.



Cathy Schmalenbach, owner of John Edwards Salon, received the minority owned small business award.

Terry had the same speech writer he wouldn't bother repeating what the congressman had already said.

Carrying the good-natured theme forward, the awards were presented Oscar-style with sealed envelopes delivered to the podium as everyone who had gathered at the Bellevue Garden Cafe waited in anticipation.

Recipients of the award were nominated by chamber members and had to complete a questionnaire to determine such things as business growth, innovation, job creation and community contributions. Each of the 15 finalists was honored with a small display at one end of the banquet facility, and the award winners received a trophy.

Five finalists were nominated for the award in the one to 15 full-time employee cat-



Jayme and Ryan Cronk, owners of Cake Specialists, received the breaking ground small business award.

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