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2008-2009

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Celebrating Excellence in Northern Colorado Business



Special Section B
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Welcome to the *Northern Colorado Business Report's* 11th annual Bravo! Entrepreneur Awards. This year, more than ever, it is important for us to take the time to recognize and honor the efforts of the daring and determined individuals willing to take the risks necessary to succeed in business.

We have all seen firsthand the effects of our rapidly deteriorating economy – even down to the rescheduling of the Bravo! event itself. Northern Colorado had been spared some of the worst, so far, and credit for that goes, in large part, to the great number of innovators who are part of our region's business community. With the Bravo! Awards, we salute our outstanding entrepreneurs, but with all our hearts we thank all who combine creativity and courage to keep our economy chugging along in tough times.

In addition to a new venue, a new format and new time of year for our celebration, we have added a new Bravo! award to our traditional seven categories. The Publisher's Special Award for Exceptional Service will be presented only when extraordinary circumstances require recognition of an individual, company or organization that has stepped up for the benefit of the region's business community as a whole.

This year we are proud to present the first-ever award to the United Ways of Larimer and Weld Counties for their actions after the tornado that tore through Windsor last May. Their story appears on Page 7 of this program.

Thank you to our Title Sponsor EKS&H for making the Bravo! celebration possible, the Greeley Stampede for providing our honoree escorts, and the Union Colony Civic Center for the use of the terrific facility that has brought new excitement to our event. Thank you also to the many corporate table sponsors for their continuing support of *NCBR* and the region's businesses. We look forward to seeing you all again next year.



Jeff Nuttall
Publisher

Northern Colorado Business Report

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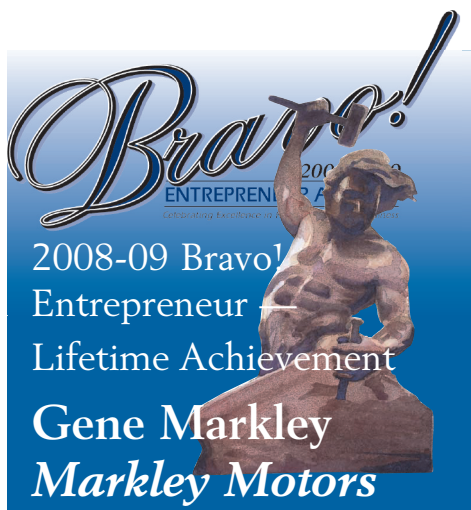
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ON THE COVER – The Markley family – from left, Carrie Baumgart, Doug Markley and Cindy DeGroot – help winner Gene Markley (second from right) celebrate his Bravo! Lifetime Achievement Award. *Image by Krista Watzel.*

Gene Markley passionate about family, business



Automotive dealer recognized for 50-year commitment to local community

By Kristen Tatti
ktatti@ncbr.com

Gene Markley has passionately wound family, community and business into a long and successful career.

"I love the business," he said. "The auto business has been my life."

But Markley did not intend to take on the automotive business founded by his father, Ferd. After earning his civil engineering degree from Colorado A&M — now Colorado State University in 1947 — Gene traveled to Montana to work in highway construction. Returning to Colorado a year later, he tried his hand at entrepreneurship, co-founding a concrete company. At the time, it was the only mobile ready-mix company in the region.

Even as a business owner, he didn't completely escape the draw of Markley Motors. "On rainy days, I'd work at the dealership because we couldn't pour concrete," he explained.

When Ferd Markley decided he would try his hand at politics, it was time for his son to dedicate himself to the family business. He and his partner sold the concrete company and by 1950, Gene Markley had made Markley Motors his full-time focus.

In 1959, Markley expanded the company through a purchase of a Chrysler-Plymouth dealership, adding it to the existing Dodge



Krista Watzel, Northern Colorado Business Report

FAMILY DRIVE — Markley Motors Inc. is a four-generation company founded by Gene Markley's (right) father, Ferd. Following in the business is Gene's son Doug and granddaughters Cindy DeGroot and Carrie Baumgart (left).

line housed at 330 S. College Ave. Within a few years, Markley Motors enveloped most of the 200 block of North College Avenue.

"We had to (move)," Markley explained. "We were showing cars out in the street."

Son Doug Markley, who now serves as president of the company, recalls his duty of moving the vehicles every few hours to avoid parking tickets.

The 1973 move to 3401 S. College Ave. proved to be a wise one. Less than a year after Markley closed on the property, plans for the Foothills Mall were announced.

Bringing on Honda

The move also allowed for an expansion that Gene Markley says was the best business decision the company made. He had been hearing from other dealers about the Honda line — all raving about the brand — but the Japanese auto maker was not immediately interested in a franchise in Fort Collins, reckoning that the town did not have the right demographics. At the time, the brand wasn't well known here.

"I thought that Honda didn't even make a car," Doug Markley said. "I thought they only made motorcycles."

But Gene Markley persisted, finally securing the Honda franchise at the end of 1974. The following year, the country experienced its first major fuel shortage, and people were lining up to trade in their Lincolns and Cadillacs for a more fuel-efficient means of transportation.

"We had a waiting list," Markley remembered.

Judi Payton, an employee since 1956, added that the dealership kept the waiting list hanging on the wall that ran all the way to the floor. "All you had to do to sell a Honda was be able to answer the phone," she said.

Today, Honda represents 60 percent of the dealership's new car sales.

Another major decision for Markley Motors came a few years later. In 1979, the company decided to split from Chrysler in order to sell the General Motors line.

"We thought it was a better franchise," Markley said.

Doug Markley remembers the trip to Denver to tell the Chrysler executives that they would not be selling the brand anymore.

"Dad said it felt like asking for a divorce," he recalled. Despite the feeling of separation, it's a decision Gene Markley said he has never regretted.

A new generation

In the late 1980s, father made way for son, again — somewhat. Doug Markley took over the title of president of the dealership, with Gene Markley becoming chairman. The change was made more concrete in 1991, when Doug Markley was listed as the dealer in charge of the company's newest line — Saturn.

But the title change didn't alter the dedication and amount of time Gene spent at the dealership — he says he only just got used to not showing up every day about a year ago. While he only visits the dealership a few times per week, he calls Payton every day to check in.

Gene Markley said he didn't anticipate that his family would follow in his footsteps, taking over the family business.

"I never made that overture with (Doug) when he was in school," he said. "I was just glad to get him out of here."

All joking aside, Gene Markley cannot hide the pride he feels for his family, especially now that his granddaughters — Carrie Baumgart, a dealer in training, and Cindy DeGroot, marketing specialist for the Saturn dealership — are taking a hand in the business.

"I had no idea that it would come to where it is today," he said. "It's in our blood, apparently."

The pride flows both ways. For Doug Markley, his father's legacy lives on in his honesty, integrity and philanthropy, improving the community through donations of time and money. His volunteer positions included serving on the Poudre Valley Hospital Board of Trustees, Poudre Valley Hospital Foundation board, past president of the Fort Collins Rotary Club, past president of the Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce and past president of the Colorado Auto Dealers Association.

The impressions he has made on his family have also seeped into the business. Baumgart said she has learned much from "Papa."

"He's always strived to keep all the employees happy," she said. "That's something that has carried down to me."

Honors accumulate

The elder Markley admits to being embarrassed about receiving the Bravo! award. Despite his modesty, this isn't the 85-year-old's first honor.

In 1971, he received the Time magazine Dealer Quality Award — only the second Colorado dealer to be so honored. He has received the "Hope Award" from the Multiple Sclerosis Society, a Torch Award from the Better Business Bureau, and in 2007 received the Community Foundation of Northern Colorado's Founders Award.

His passion for family, community and business will perhaps leave one of the largest gifts — as the Markley name promises to continue to make a difference in Northern Colorado.

Past winners — Lifetime Achievement

- 2007 Larry Kendall, Fort Collins
- 2006 B.D. "Pete" Peterson and J. Barney Flood
- 2005 George Hall, Greeley
- 2004 Bill Neal and Leo Schuster, Fort Collins and Loveland
- 2003 Kathryn Hach-Darrow, Loveland
- 2002 Bob Tointon, Greeley
- 2001 Tom Gleason, Fort Collins
- 2000 Ken Monfort, Greeley
- 1999 Bob Everitt, Fort Collins
- 1998 W.D. Farr, Greeley

Finalists

Finalists for the Bravo! Entrepreneur Lifetime Achievement Award included:

- Don Churchwell; Home State Bank
- Don Cook, M.D.; Monfort Children's Clinic
- Bonnie Dean; Bonnie Dean Associates
- Jack Devereaux; Home State Bank
- Bill Farr; Guaranty Bank (Centennial Bank of the West)
- Bruce & Denise Freestone; OpenStage Theatre & Company
- Loren Maxey; Maxey Cos.
- Darrell McAllister; Bank of Choice
- Spiro Palmer; Palmer Florists
- Wayne Schrader; Schrader Oil Co.

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"Self-Made Man" by world-renowned Loveland sculptor Bobbie Carlyle, a fitting visual metaphor for the struggles of the entrepreneur bringing an idea to life, is the award received by every Bravo! Entrepreneur honored since 1997.



Northern Colorado **BUSINESS REPORT**



FRONT RANGE ENERGY LLC

Under Schwerin, Alliance footprint grew with area



Riding the economic waves, construction company prospered

By Tom Hacker
thacker@ncbr.com

Three months ago, Alliance Construction Solutions President and CEO Clayton Schwerin decided that 2009 would be his last year at the helm of the company he has led since 1993.

A succession plan calls for management, and majority ownership, to be transferred over the course of this year to Bill Joyner, who Schwerin had appointed president in December, and Brian Weinmaster, who became executive vice president of Alliance at the same time.

When the two take control, they will be the beneficiaries of having spent the past decade or more watching one of Northern Colorado's most talented entrepreneurs on the job. Schwerin's skill in building Alliance during his tenure, and nurturing a corporate culture that keeps employees happy and productive, has earned him the 2008-09 Northern Colorado Business Report's Bravo! Entrepreneur Award for Loveland.

"My philosophy is to find the best talent, the top draft choices, and then train them, teach them, and help them to become the best that they can be," Schwerin said. "You give people opportunities, and then recognize when it's time to get out of their way. I think tomorrow's business is going to have to be run by people better than the people we have today, including me."

When Joyner and Weinmaster complete the transition during this year, they will have inherited a company that is much different from the one Schwerin took over when it was known as Baldwin Construction Inc. The Alliance name came in 1995,



Tom Hacker, Northern Colorado Business Report

PASSING THE REINS — After 16 years in the job of president and CEO of Alliance Construction Solutions Inc., Clayton Schwerin, here in his Loveland office, is preparing to transfer ownership and management to successors he has mentored.

Finalists

Finalists for the Loveland Bravo! Entrepreneur Award included:

- Hamid and Janice Eslan; The Black Steer Restaurant
- Jerry Helgeson; American Eagle Distributing

in Schwerin's second year, and the company's geographic reach began to expand.

Within 10 years, a Cheyenne office opened under Weinmaster's direction, and quickly found success with health care and school projects in a state where public budgets were swelling during the energy boom.

"Of our \$120 million in annual revenue, we think \$20 million to \$30 million will come out of our Wyoming office," Schwerin said at the time. The results, over the past three years, are on target.

Looking south

Schwerin recognized other opportunities outside Northern Colorado, especially in the metro Denver market where hotel,

apartment and other commercial projects have kept a Denver-based staff busy.

One measure of Alliance's success comes from a collective that Schwerin calls the Peer Group, a group of seven CEOs of general contracting businesses scattered nationwide. The members meet quarterly to evaluate one another's business status and make recommendations for changes.

At a December meeting in Loveland, as the construction industry nationwide was reeling from the collapse of capital markets, the six visiting execs found Alliance in full sail.

"They gave us some pretty high marks," Schwerin said. "In the last five years that we had made a lot of successful changes, and it showed. I think some of them were a little envious that we're in Colorado, where the conditions are better than in some other places, and where it's easier to recruit good people."

Schwerin's colleagues in the construction business can easily describe the attributes that have led to his success at Alliance. Fort Collins builder-developer Jay Stoner, who hopes to involve Alliance in his Riverwalk project at Interstate 25 and Harmony Road, said Alliance is the product of a rare combination of attributes.

"Clayton's got a really healthy blend of

discipline and analytical business sense," Stoner said. "But what makes him really successful is that he blends that with a lot of passion and emotion. A lot of people have one or the other. But Clayton has both, and that's why he's been successful."

Past winners — Loveland

- 2007** Linda Ligon, Interweave Press
- 2006** Susan Jessup, Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch
- 2005** Jerry Donnan, Kroll Factual Data Inc.
- 2004** Mark Burke, Burke Cleaners and Mister Neat's Formalwear
- 2003** Ervin Weinmeister, Super Vacuum Manufacturing Co.
- 2002** Jack Devereaux, Home State Bank
- 2001** Chad & Troy McWhinney, McWhinney Enterprises
- 2000** Bill Beierwaltes, Colorado Memory Systems, Colorado Time Systems, OnStream Inc.
- 1999** Dave Duke, Duke Communications International
- 1998** Thom Schultz, Group Publishing Inc.

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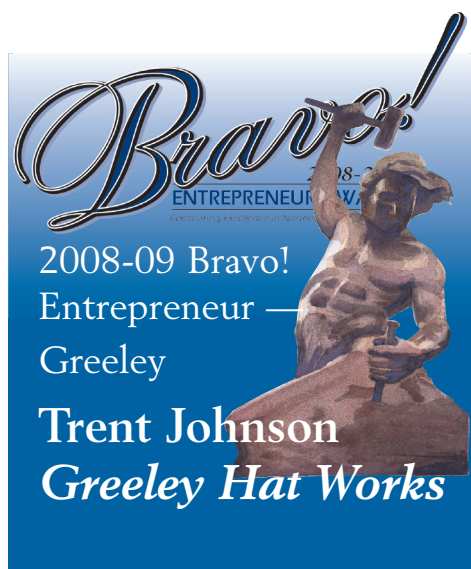
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Presents



Hats off to Trent Johnson, 2008-09 Bravo! Entrepreneur



Greeley Hat Works has grown to build thousands of toppers

By Kristen Tatti
ktatti@ncbr.com

GREELEY — The entrepreneurial spirit has always been in Trent Johnson's heart, but it wasn't until his stint as a ranch hand in northwest Greeley that he found it was in his head, too.

While attending the University of Northern Colorado in pursuit of an education degree, Johnson worked at Susie Orr's ranch, doing everything from irrigating to building fences to delivering calves. In addition to ranching, Orr owned Greeley Hat Works, a nearly 100-year-old company she purchased in 1985.

When Orr decided to move Greeley Hat Works from her ranch to a downtown Greeley storefront, Johnson found himself spending a lot of time at the shop. The art of hat making, an increasingly lost one, truly appealed to him.

"The thing I liked about it is that I got to build something from start to finish," he said. With a storefront, the company quickly became a full-time job.

"Before, when it was at the ranch, we would shut down in the summer," he said. The company would see customers only by appointment. "Now, it was like a real business with regular hours."

The 9-to-5 grind didn't appeal to Orr, according to Johnson, providing him with an opportunity to buy the business. It wouldn't be his first foray into business ownership.

As a middle school student, Johnson took a magic class one summer so that he could earn money by performing at younger children's birthday parties. In high school, he started a lawn service company. Johnson recalls that his father, to instill in him the lessons of entrepreneurship, required his son to lease the lawn mower



Michael D. Wailes. Northern Colorado Business Report

HANDS ON — Trent Johnson, owner of Greeley Hat Works, is still involved in building 90 percent of the 3,000 hats his business produces each year.

Finalists

Finalists for the Greeley Bravo! Entrepreneur Award included:

- Dale Butcher and Bruce White Conquest Oil Co.
- Todd and Zeke Garretson Garretson's Sports Center

from him and pay him mileage when the younger Johnson needed transportation to jobs before he got his driver's license. By his senior year, Johnson had several employees. He sold the business to one of the employees when he graduated.

To raise the money to purchase Greeley Hat Works, Johnson first attended classes at the Small Business Development Center to help him formulate a business plan. He presented the plan to several area banks, but had no takers. He approached family members with the plan and got a similar recep-

tion. However, his parents informed him that he already had the money to buy the business. They had been saving and investing the rent payments they had charged him while he lived at home to attend college.

Johnson took ownership of Greeley Hat Works in 1996, and its growth since has earned the Bravo! 2008 Entrepreneur Award for Greeley.

"I think my plan was to grow smart, not fast," he said. Johnson had an opportunity to take on a partner that would have grown the business by leaps and bounds into more of a factory instead of a custom shop.

"It ended up not working out and that was a huge blessing," he said. Even with "smart" growth, Greeley Hat works has grown fast.

In 1995, the company sold 60 hats. After his first year as owner, it expanded to 120 hats. By 2005, he sold 800 hats, after expanding to a new shop.

The company's hats have gone international, gone to Hollywood and even to Washington, on the heads of President

George W. Bush and the diplomats who visit him. Greeley Hat Works is on track to sell 3,000 hats this year, and Johnson still has a hand in about 90 percent of what goes out the door.

"I don't want to give that up," he said. "I don't know if I ever will."

Past winners — Greeley

- 2007 Larry Seastrom, New Frontier Bank
- 2006 Roger Knoph, Envirotech Services Inc.
- 2005 Mark Kendall, Kendall Printing Co.
- 2004 Tim and Sally Warde, Northern Colorado Paper Inc.
- 2003 Tom Roche, Roche Constructors Inc.
- 2002 Ruben & Scott Ehrlich, Ehrlich Motors
- 2001 Jerry Morgensen, Hensel Phelps Construction Co.
- 2000 Bill Farr, Centennial Bank of the West
- 1999 John Todd, Toddy's
- 1998 Darrell McAllister, 1st Choice Bank



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Odells near two decades of brewing excellence

Fort Collins' first microbrewery blazes new product trails

By Tom Hacker
thacker@ncbr.com

FORT COLLINS — New Belgium Brewing Co. founder Jeff Lebesch was still pedaling around from abbey to abbey in Belgium collecting ale recipes in 1989 when Doug and Wynne Odell opened a new frontier by launching Fort Collins' first craft brewery.

Twenty years later, Odell Brewing Co. is a frequent match for New Belgium, its larger local competitor, in international brewing competitions, routinely racking up gold medals for its offerings.

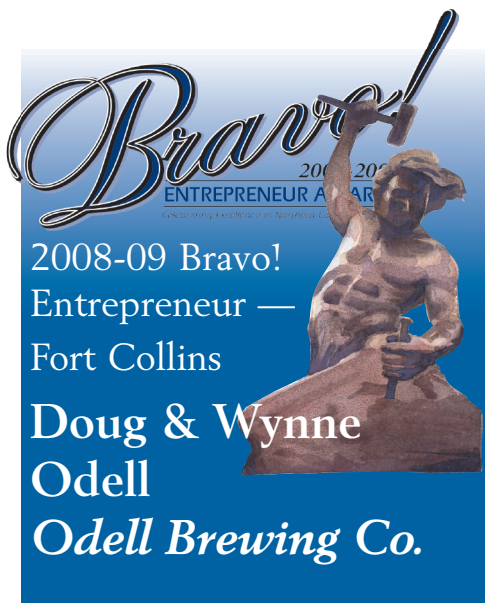
"The recognition we get is a big part of what makes this so enjoyable," Doug Odell said. "It's great to be honored like that, especially by our peers."

The role the Odells have played in making craft brewing one of Northern Colorado's key economic sectors, and their commitment to community in the process, earn them the 2008 Bravo! Entrepreneur Award for Fort Collins.

Odell Brewing Co.'s 40,000-barrel annual production capacity lands it among the top 40 craft brewers in the nation. But the focus at Odell these days is not so much on quantity as on quality, with special releases of new super-premium beers and a new "pilot" series of small-batch offerings available only on tap at the brewery northeast of Old Town.

"This has been a labor of love, definitely," Doug Odell said at the Aug. 18 release party for Woodcut No. 1, as he uncorked the first bottle of an oak-aged ale that was produced using techniques more common in Napa Valley wineries than in Northern Colorado breweries. "This project started more than a year ago with the concept."

The result: A limited run of 120 cases,



with each 750 ml. bottle corked with wire cages, champagne-style. The price: also champagne-style, with a suggested retail price of \$24.99 per bottle.

Fast track for startup

The Odells launched their business two decades ago using the proceeds from the sale of their Seattle home and investments from friends and family. They chose Fort Collins in part to join Doug Odell's sister, Corky, who joined the couple in starting the company. In just 18 months, Odell was in the black — a fast track for any startup business.

For its first seven years, Odell's products were available only on tap, at taverns throughout Colorado and at the brew-house. In 1996, the company began bottling its beer for retail sales. The standard offerings now include flagship 90 Shilling English-style ale, Five Barrel Pale Ale, Cutthroat Porter, Easy Street Wheat, Levity Amber Ale and, the newest, India Pale Ale.

The Odell market network has expanded well beyond its Northern Colorado home, with products now available in eight Rocky Mountain and Midwestern states, most recently Arizona.

Likewise, the Lincoln Avenue brewery has expanded twice over the years to accommodate the growing market, and another major expansion is in the works.

Today Doug and Wynne Odell are planning their 20th anniversary, and locals can anticipate a party akin to last summer's Small Batch Festival, when 3,500 people descended on the brewery to soak up Odell beer — and the company's culture.

"A lot of who we are is our story," Wynne Odell told the *Business Report* two years ago. "It really contributes to our success."



Tom Hacker, Northern Colorado Business Report

BREW HOME — Odell Brewing Co. cofounder Doug Odell stands outside the brewhouse and taproom that have become a popular Fort Collins stop for traveling microbrew aficionados.

Finalists

Finalists for the Fort Collins Bravo! Entrepreneur Award included:

- Larry Dolgin; Professional Document Management/The Feet
- Gretchen Gaede & Ryan Keiffer; A-Train Marketing Communications

Past winners — Fort Collins

- 2007 Rulon Stacey, Poudre Valley Health Systems
- 2006 Terry Drahota, Drahota Commercial LLC
- 2005 Lori Schlotter, Colorado CustomWare Inc.
- 2004 David Bethune, Atrix Laboratories Inc.
- 2003 William Ward, Front Range Internet
- 2002 David & Jim Neenan, The Neenan Cos.
- 2001 Spiro Palmer, Palmer Gardens
- 2000 Kim Jordan & Jeff Lebesch, New Belgium Brewing Co.
- 1999 Douglas Schatz, Advanced Energy Industries Inc.
- 1998 Kent and Gloria Sampson, Value Plastics Inc.

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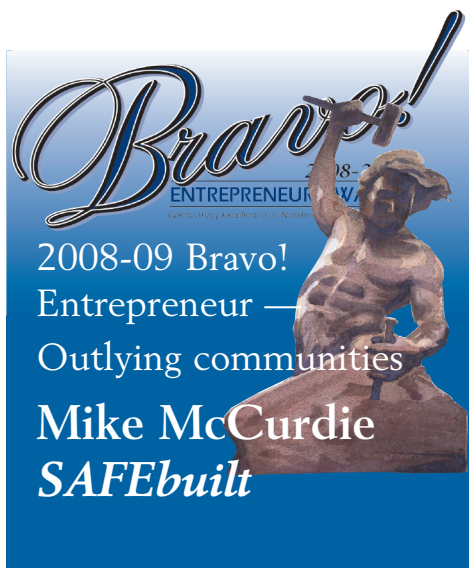
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SAFEbuilt took services into field after tornado



Windsor company waived fees, raised funds after twister

By Steve Porter
sporter@ncbr.com

WINDSOR — When a tornado struck the town of Windsor in May, Mike McCurdie and the staff at SAFEbuilt leaped into action.

SAFEbuilt, a private building inspection services company that provides building department services to the town of Windsor, outfitted a mobile permitting system and took it to the homes and businesses damaged by the devastating twister.

Not only did McCurdie and the SAFEbuilt team respond immediately to the need in the hard-hit community, they waived fees to help those already feeling a financial strain.

And then they went one better, setting up a tornado relief fund that eventually collected about \$24,000 to help rebuild town facilities.

Jackie O'Hara, a business colleague of McCurdie's, said that's why she nominated him to win the 2008 Bravo award for outlying areas.

"It was pretty inspiring to me," O'Hara said. "When people were freaking out, there wasn't any question (McCurdie and his team) wouldn't try to find an answer for. They tried to get the situation resolved as quickly as possible."

McCurdie said SAFEbuilt ultimately waived about \$130,000 in permit fees to get people back into their homes and business-

es as quickly as possible.

"We just wanted to expedite the process and help people out," he said. "It was just the right thing to do — no question."

McCurdie, a former LSI Logic employee with a degree in chemical engineering, had long worked in the semiconductor industry. But there came a time when he decided he wanted a new direction for his life.

"I just woke up one day and realized it was time for a change," he said.

Began with a buy

In 1999, after about 18 months of trying to figure out what that change would be, he purchased Colorado Inspection Agency, which provides building services to government entities without a full-time building department staff.

In 2006, the business changed its name to SAFEbuilt Inc. after expanding its operations to Georgia. Since then, the company has further expanded into Washington, Louisiana and Florida.

In addition to Windsor, SAFEbuilt provides building department services to Wellington, Timnath, Nunn, Severance, Pierce, Ault, Mead, Firestone, Lyons, Platteville, Kersey, Gilcrest, Hudson, Bennett, Hayden, Granby, Idaho Springs, Morrison, Vail, Red Cliff, Castle Pines North and Centennial.

McCurdie said while small towns are his most likely clients, even big municipalities like Centennial — population 105,000 — can benefit.

"We're able to bring a depth and breadth of experience to support any size municipality," he said.

McCurdie said his 74 employees are well-versed in the building world. "We look for former municipal building inspectors. We've also found we have great luck with contractors and tradesmen who want to stay in the business and see another side of it."

Using a private company for building department services is becoming more popular with governments in an era of tight budgets, he said.

"You're seeing that play out in red ink these days," McCurdie said. "We help them convert a fixed expense to a variable cost. We get paid when the permit is issued."

McCurdie said the concept of governments contracting for building services from a private company is still "quite unique" but is starting to catch on.

"Nationwide, it's not the standard but more and more as government looks at ways to reduce costs we're finding they're more and more interested in our services," he said.



Courtesy SAFEbuilt

Past winners — Outlying communities

- 2007** Martin Lind; Water Valley, Windsor
- 2006** Andy and Bob Brown; Harsh International Inc., Eaton
- 2005** Tom Baur and Garry Gorsuch; Meadowlark Optics, Frederick
- 2004** Mark Hopkins; Peak Industries Inc., Frederick
- 2003** Tom Gray; Gray Oil Co. Inc., Fort Lupton
- 2002** Israel "Izzy" Salazar; TSN Inc., Frederick
- 2001** Joe & Bob Raith; Morning Fresh Farms, Platteville
- 2000** Bob, Max & Dean Walker; Walker Manufacturing Co., Fort Collins
- 1999** Louis Lucio; Armadillo, LaSalle
- 1998** Bill Coleman; Colorado Greenhouse Holdings Inc., Fort Lupton

SAFEBUILT MAN — Mike McCurdie, owner of SAFEbuilt, left the semiconductor industry to pursue a new direction. That pursuit led to SAFEbuilt which provides building services to government agencies without full-time building department staff.

Finalists

Finalists for the Outlying Communities Bravo! Entrepreneur Award included:

- Chauncey and Christi Taylor; Johnson's Corner, Johnstown
- Charles Wilson; A-1 Organics, Eaton

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REPORT**



CSU eco-devo office left indelible mark on state

Technology transfer, workforce training are agency's legacies

By Noah Guillaume
nguillaume@ncbr.com

FORT COLLINS — Colorado State University's Office of Economic Development had regional spirit, but it was not reserved for Northern Colorado only. Even though the 2008 Bravo! Regional Spirit Award winner got its start in the local area it had always had the benefit for all of Colorado in mind.

During the time since Bravo! judges selected the university's economic development office to receive the award,



LAMBERT

the office closed and its activities were folded into the realm of its parent organization, the CSU Office of Outreach and Strategic Partnerships.

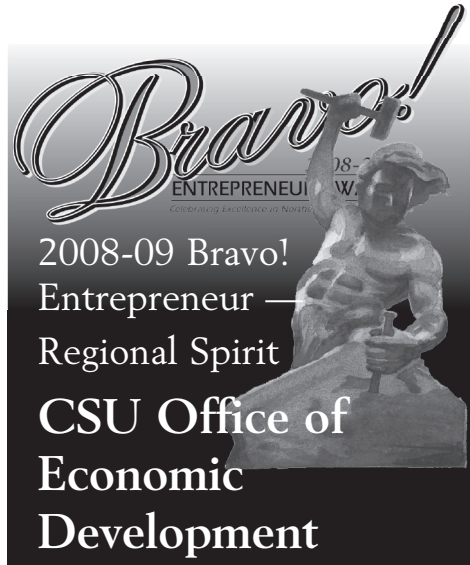
But the record of achievement posted by the agency's director and staff is indelible.

The idea for the university's economic development office grew out of the realization that CSU had lost its connection with the community. "We asked 'What does it mean to be a 21st-century land-grant university?'" said Hunt Lambert, who headed the office with the title associate vice president for economic development. "We felt we did not connect well with the community."

To address the disconnect, CSU launched the agency on Nov. 1, 2005, with the mission "to grow the health of the Colorado economy by building partnerships with industry, local communities and economic development organizations; implementing economic development research and outreach programs; and supporting CSU startups."

Traditional economic development agencies recruit businesses to their regions and then work to keep them there. But organizers of the CSU office decided to make sure communities statewide benefit based on what CSU does by focusing on delivery of technology developed at the university and delivery of talent for local businesses.

In its three-year existence the office established three technology superclusters, including global health solutions, cancer



research and clean energy. The staff also re-engineered CSU's technology-transfer process and launched the CSU Global Campus in September to provide skilled workers for startups and other area businesses.

Keeping IP rights

Such technology transfer efforts have only been possible since 1980, when federal law gave universities intellectual property rights over inventions developed on campus.

Lambert, who today serves in a closely related role as associate provost for the Division of Continuing Education, and his economic development office staff turned the long and winding road of getting inventions from concept to market into a superhighway to speed the newly developed technologies to businesses which can in turn bring them to market.

The most notable success of the revamped tech-transfer process is AVA Solar Inc. Using production techniques developed at CSU, the solar panel maker has raised \$150 million in financing and expects to employ up to 500 when it reaches full production in its Longmont factory.

Lambert also pointed to other success stories such as Spirae Inc., Envirofit International Ltd. and Solix Biofuels.

To bolster the workforce for those and other emerging companies, the online Global Campus program caters to students with existing college credits or associate's degrees and those seeking master's degrees in Organizational Studies, Public Management and Online Teaching and Learning. The campus launched with approximately 300 students registered.

Making the campus Internet-based provides a convenience for potential students who would not otherwise consider going back to school. "We need to stop demanding everyone come to campus," Lambert said. "And (Global Campus) can deliver talent anywhere in the state."

Past winners – Regional Spirit

- 2007 AIMS Community College, Greeley/Loveland
- 2006 Premier Colorado, Fort Collins
- 2005 New Belgium Brewing Co., Fort Collins
- 2004 Monfort Family Foundation, Eaton
- 2003 The Bohemian Foundation, Fort Collins
- 2002 Longs Peak Council of the Boy Scouts
- 2001 State Farm Insurance Co., Greeley/Evans
- 2000 Greeley Independence Stampede, Greeley
- 1999 Eastman Kodak Co. (Kodak Colorado Division), Windsor
- 1998 Hewlett Packard Co., Fort Collins

Finalists

Finalists for the Regional Spirit Bravo! Entrepreneur Award included:

- Agilent Technologies
- Erion Foundation
- Funding Partners for Housing Solutions
- High Plains Arts Council
- Loveland Commercial Real Estate
- McKee Foundation
- Northern Colorado Legislative Alliance
- The Brendle Group



Business Report Events

ECONOMIC FORECAST	Jan. 14, 2010 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.	Posing questions and finding answers on vital regional economic issues.	A lunch event. Tickets \$40 per person. Corporate tables \$450
Bravo! ENTREPRENEUR AWARDS	March 11 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. Union Colony Civic Center Greeley	Honoring Northern Colorado's most successful entrepreneurs. Sponsored by: EKS&H; Greeley Stampede; KUNC	Awards program and cocktail/hors d'oeuvres reception. Tickets \$45 per person. Corporate tables including business sponsor package \$450
Green Summit Blending business & the environment	April 9 7:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Followed by City of Fort Collins EnviroVation Reception, Drake Centre, Fort Collins	A day-long event with speakers, panelists and exhibitors pointing the way to going green. Sponsored by: City of Fort Collins; City of Greeley	The Green Summit shows how business and environmental stewardship go hand-in-hand.
Mercury 100	May 20 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.	Honoring the top 100 fastest growing businesses in Northern Colorado. Sponsored by: EKS&H	Awards program and cocktail-hors d'oeuvres reception.
NORTHERN COLORADO Women of Influence	Aug. 13 7:30 - 9:30 a.m. Embassy Suites, Loveland	Ten women (and possibly one man) will be honored for their achievements in business, philanthropic and government organizations. Sponsored by: EKS&H	Celebrating the contributions women make to the Northern Colorado community. A breakfast awards event.
bixpo	Sept. 17 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Embassy Suites, Loveland	Bixpo 2009 will include the region's largest B2B Business Expo and Bixpo After Hours.	See and be seen at Bixpo. The 5th annual business exchange.
IFITTEST EXECS	Sept. 17 7:30 - 9:30 a.m. At Bixpo Embassy Suites, Loveland	Who's the fittest exec of all? Whose company team powers their business with fitness? Sponsored by: Banner Health and LiveWell	A breakfast event filled with awards and fun.
40 under FORTY	Sept. 17 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. At Bixpo Embassy Suites, Loveland	Celebrating the up and coming young professionals of Northern Colorado. Sponsored by: EKS&H	A lunch event. Tickets \$35 per person. Corporate tables \$750
BIXPO BUSINESS AFTER HOURS	Sept. 17 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. At Bixpo Embassy Suites, Loveland	September's only business after hours event. Don't miss it. See and be seen at Bixpo. Sponsored by: Public Service Credit Union	Event Partners: Fort Collins, Loveland and Greeley Chambers of Commerce

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Clean Air Lawn Care proves that green can be profitable



Landscape firm does good business while doing good for planet

By **Kate Hawthorne**
khawthorne@ncbr.com

FORT COLLINS — Kelly Giard wants to clear the air — one lawn at a time.

Clean Air Lawn Care was conceived in 2003, when Giard says he scribbled down the idea of an environmentally friendly landscape maintenance firm late one night. In 2005 the then-stockbroker hired a graduate student to research the concept.

"She looked into whether the equipment available could deliver, and could such a business be viable," said Giard, who holds both a bachelor's degree in environmental policy and analysis and a master's in finance from Boston University. When both answers were yes, he and wife Stephanie invested about \$50,000 in Clean Air Lawn Care.

The business officially launched late in 2006, and has grown to 23 territories with 10 — soon to be 12 — franchisees and six company-owned locations in cities from Seattle to Atlanta, with corporate headquarters in Fort Collins. For bringing his vision to life, Kelly Giard has been named Northern Colorado's Bravo! Emerging Entrepreneur for 2008.

Why would a stockbroker chuck it all to mow lawns, even before the global market meltdown?

The short answer is that the company combines the 37-year-old's experience — he had a lawn-mowing business while in high school in Walla Walla, Wash. — with his passion.

"Small engines, mostly in lawn maintenance equipment, contribute 5 to 10 percent of the nation's air pollution," Giard explained. "We believe that can be zero percent. Our goal is to change the way America mows the lawn."

But he's as passionate about running a



successful business as saving the planet.

"I believe in the triple win," Giard said. "A business has to serve its customers and be profitable as well as have a positive effect on the environment. That's harder than it sounds."

Equipment challenges

Clean Air Lawn Care's phenomenal growth — Giard estimates 150 percent in Fort Collins in addition to the franchises — comes in the face of skepticism from established landscapers. "A lot of people in the industry told us we were stupid," he recalled.

He also figures he's spent an additional \$250,000 to \$500,000 to find the best all-electric mowers and maintenance techniques to keep them operating clean and green.

"The technology is moving at a pretty fast rate," Giard said. "But it's like the cell phone. We're past the old brick stage, but we're not to the iPhone yet. We just keep pushing the envelope."

Part of that involves a partnership with manufacturer Black & Decker to help improve its electric outdoor equipment.

Franchising is an integral part of the Clean Air business plan. Local owners know not only what local lawns and gardens need, but also what local regulations will allow, especially in the use of non-chemical fertilizers.

Giard plans to continue pushing the envelope by growing to between 300 and 500 franchises throughout the nation and parts of Canada within the next decade.

"It's good to be smart," he said. "But it's good to be lucky, too. We had no idea this big green movement was coming, but we were brave enough to step out onto the wave and not let it pass us by."

Clean Air continues to ride the environmental wave as a featured business in the Spring 2009 State of the Green Union report recently released by Fort Collins-based GenGreen, a comprehensive resource for those interested in a locally focused, environmentally conscious lifestyle. It recognized Clean Air for its exemplary efforts in both environmental and social responsibility.



Krista Watzel, Northern Colorado Business Report

Past winners — Emerging entrepreneur

- 2007 Steve Byers; EnergyLogic, Berthoud
- 2006 Kevin Brinkman; Brinkman Partners, Fort Collins
- 2005 Paul and Nenita Pelligrino; Nita Crisp Crackers, Fort Collins
- 2004 Bruce Golden, Bernard E. Rollin & Ralph V. Switzer Jr., Optibrand Ltd. LLC, Fort Collins
- 2003 Tom and Kristi Johnson, Bingham Hill Cheese Co., Fort Collins
- 2002 Maury Dobbie, MediaTech Productions, Fort Collins
- 2001 Jeff Whitham, Encorp Inc., Windsor
- 2000 Tim Gan, OpenLCR.com, Fort Collins
- 1999 Eastman Kodak Co., Windsor
- 1998 Hewlett-Packard Co., Fort Collins

GREEN TEAM — Clean Air Lawn Care owners Kelly and Stephanie Giard, above left, and with staff Chris Johnson and Meisha Pyke (back row), Michelle Holbrook (left), Katie Van Sant and Annie Carey.

Finalists

Finalists for the Bravo! Emerging Entrepreneur Award included:

- Ben Adams; Adams Bird Control, Fort Collins
- Gerard Nalezny and Mark Kross; Fort Collins Commerce Bank, Fort Collins

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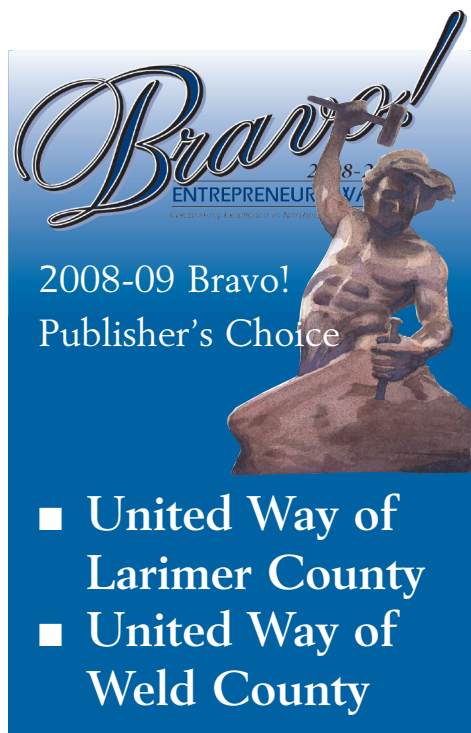



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United they stood: Aid agencies took tornado lead



United Way groups share first special publisher's award

By Tom Hacker
thacker@ncbr.com

Windsor Mayor John Vasquez was succinct in offering a summary of the events of May 22, 2008, during an interview with reporters that evening.

"It will be a long time before the town recovers from this," Vasquez said — an obvious understatement. The almost unfathomable damage to property in Windsor and along a swath that an F3 tornado cut through western Weld County at midday had hardly been tallied. It would be days before the number of destroyed or heavily damaged properties would become known.

But within an hour of the storm's passage through Windsor, the two United Way organizations that serve Northern Colorado were in motion.

"Tornadoes in Weld County are like an everyday occurrence at that time of year," said Jeannine Truswell, executive director of the United Way for the county. "Someone came into a training meeting we were having, and said there was a tornado on the ground in western Weld County. I looked at our 2-1-1 director, Brian Fowler, and said, maybe we should go upstairs" to the 2-1-1 phone center, a clearing house for United Way help and information calls.

A half hour later, Fowler got a call from the Weld County sheriff's office requesting that he come to the department's Emergency Operations Center.

"He was there for the next four days," Truswell said.

Gordon Thibedeau, president and CEO of the United Way of Larimer County, likewise got the call about the mayhem in Weld County shortly after the storm passed through and arced northwestward into Larimer County.

"We realized pretty quickly that this was



Tom Hacker, Northern Colorado Business Report

TEAM OF TWO — Gordon Thibedeau, left, president of the United Way of Larimer County, and Jeannine Truswell, executive director of the United Way of Weld County, reunite in Windsor where they collaborated on tornado relief work last May and where repair work continues on the Windsor Town Hall.

going to be a real difficult situation," Thibedeau said. "We were heading into the three-day Memorial Day weekend, and the resources you normally would expect to find were not going to be available."

Recognition for collaboration

Working collaboratively, Truswell, Thibedeau and their staffs divided duties to meet the most urgent needs in the first days following the tornado. The Larimer County agency set up a volunteer center in western Windsor at the Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association offices in western Windsor, well outside the tornado's path of destruction.

"We knew that going into the center of Windsor was not the best approach," Thibedeau said. "That was coordinated very closely with Weld. The point was to take the burden off of the Weld group so that they would take care of the most pressing needs. At the time all this was occurring, we looked at ourselves as being an extension of Jeannine's office."

The groups also coordinated activities with other relief groups, including the Community Foundation agencies in the two counties and the American Red Cross.

In recognition of their efforts, the United Ways have been selected to receive the *Northern Colorado Business Report's* first-ever Bravo! Publisher's Award for Exceptional Service.

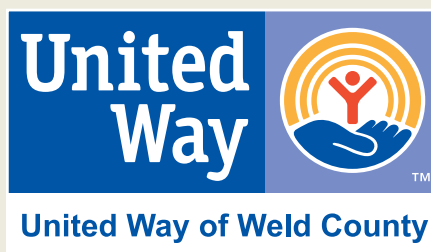
"It's very humbling for us to be recognized in this way," Truswell said. "We accept it as if it were a cast award. We took the necessary steps, and we're proud of what we did, but it was in concert with government and in concert with other agencies. It was a true collaboration."

Numbers tell the story

In the five days following the tornado that tore through western Weld County, killing one person in west Greeley and destroying hundreds of buildings in Windsor, 6,514 phone calls came through the United Way's Region One 2-1-1 call center in Greeley.

In all, 400 homes and businesses were either destroyed or so heavily damaged that the loss was total. Insured losses totaled nearly \$150 million.

During the that period and after, more than \$192,500 in contributions poured into the United Way, and were distributed to victims in the form of vouchers for food, transportation, storage costs. Much of the total was banked to fund programs run by the agency's Long Term Recovery Team.



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