

Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce IMPACT Awards Advertorial

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Impact Awards

Innovation. Response to adversity. Contributions to the community.

These are some of the ways businesses set themselves apart from each other and are key evaluation criteria for the prestigious IMPACT Award, presented by the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce (GRCC). In its previous life, the IMPACT Award was known as the Small Business Person of the Year Award. Each year until this one, the winner has been honored as part of the Chamber's BIZ LINC trade show.

The GRCC has targeted five key areas for special emphasis in the upcoming year and one of these is the support of emerging businesses. The newly named IMPACT Award, which will recognize one emerging business, will be presented at its own ceremony at the Jefferson Hotel on October 26.

Gail Johnson, awards committee co-chair, explains that the Chamber has expanded and enhanced its recognition program for small businesses. "We're trying to recognize those mid-cap businesses that are on the fast track," said Johnson. Everyone has heard of the Fortune 500 firms, she says, but many of these emerging companies are growing and prospering but functioning under the level of awareness. By establishing the awards ceremony as its own event, the Chamber is raising the bar on the award and making it even more visible and high profile.

The IMPACT Award is designed to recognize one emerging business from a pool of well-qualified new businesses experiencing stellar growth or well-established businesses that have been enjoying great success. "The award looks at the IMPACT of the company on the business community and the community fabric in general," explains Tom Grant, an attorney with McCandlish, Kaine & Grant and co-chair of this year's awards committee. In addition to the traditional measures of success such as sales, profitability, and growth in employees, the awards committee looked at nominees in terms of these other less tangible criteria. "There are great stories here in this town," exclaimed Grant.

Don't be fooled into equating emerging businesses with strictly high tech, Internet-type companies. As Grant explains, the awards committee was not trying to limit nominees by the sizzle and dazzle of high tech. Rather the committee balanced these companies with other great companies, many of which are generally familiar to all of us. Two of the top five finalists are technology companies.

Johnson said that what stood out about this year's entries was the emphasis that businesses place on intrinsic values. "[These companies] ascribe to a value system that is the core means of running the business," says Johnson. She adds that it seems to be a group effort in companies; a back-to-basics approach that's refreshing.

The awards committee consists of a cross section of top-drawer business professionals. Some, like Johnson, are former award winners. "Each year the applications get better and better," says Grant. "And each year it gets to be more difficult to pick a winner. They are close in different ways." From the pool of nominees, the committee narrows down the list to the five. Only one will emerge as the 2000 IMPACT Award winner.

Johnson, who won the Small Business Person of the Year award in 1996, can attest personally to the value of winning this prestigious award. "It gives you respect as a legitimate business. It says to the community 'I made it'." Johnson said the recognition made it easier to do business because of the credibility it established. It also afforded her opportunities to be involved in Richmond and give back to the community in ways she never thought possible before. In addition to the inherent recognition, this year's winner will enjoy a package of business services valued at \$12,000.

Past Award Winners:

1999—Sarah Paxton & Andrew Thornton, La Difference, Inc.

1998—Dick Du, Peking Restaurant

1997—Tom Gay, BMG Metals

1996—Gail Johnson, Rainbow Station

1995—Broughton Systems

IMPACT Award finalists

Here are the five finalists for the 2000 IMPACT Award. While each share similar characteristics and impressive growth, they all have their own personality and way of leaving their mark on the community.

Leo F. Burke, John D. Burke, Leo Burke Furniture, Inc.

Leo Burke Furniture is a familiar fixture in the Richmond marketplace and no stranger to adversity. Many Richmonders remember with horror the fire that destroyed the company's flagship store in Carytown in 1992. Rather than succumb to defeat, Jack Burke, owner and son of the store's founder, chose to identify an opportunity in a tragic situation. Burke took a good look at the business, something that's hard to do when you're dealing with the day-to-day details, and what emerged was a new strategic focus. Today, this well-

established retail establishment is bigger and stronger than ever and has become an anchor store in the city's largest revenue-producing retail district.

"Naturally it's a good feeling [to be in the top five]," says Burke. "Anytime you get recognition from your peers it's a good feeling." Leo Burke Furniture has been recognized before; the readers of *Style* and *Richmond Magazine* both voted Leo Burke Best Furniture Store.

Burke is proud of his company's heritage. He explains that while there are a lot of emerging technology firms, he's proud that his traditional retail store continues to grow and prosper.

Phil Conein, TECHEAD

Tell Phil Conein of TECHEAD that there seems to be a lot of him in his company and he's very quick to point out that TECHEAD's success has been a team effort. "We all try to put a lot of personal attention to the company," he explains. He's also quick to add that he would have never gotten to where he is without the help of his wife, Phillise, who works at the company with him. "We make a good team," says Conein.

TECHEAD, which provides technical staffing, computer training, web consultation, and design services all under one roof, prizes itself on its innovation. In fact, TECHEAD is the only site in the United States that links UltraDev to Linux, which allows web graphic designers to easily program a database. "This is going to change the whole way web pages are designed in the future," says Conein.

Conein was totally surprised and honored to make it to the top five in the IMPACT Awards. He shouldn't be. In 1999, he was one of *Inside Business'* "Top Forty Under Forty," and has been in the "Rising 25" for the past three years. Not too bad for a guy who started with nothing and grew his business to something significant. Conein says it's all about perseverance and refers to a quote by Winston Churchill that is posted on his monitor: "All great things are decided not by machine or gadgets but by willpower. Whoever has it will finally prevail."

Mark Raper, Carter Ryley Thomas, Inc.

Anyone who reads the Richmond business papers is by now familiar with the public relations and marketing firm, Carter Ryley Thomas. Unlike most agencies where ownership is limited to a few individuals, this firm is owned by all of its employees. "It's unique to have such broad ownership," explains Mark Raper of Carter Ryley Thomas. He goes on to say that this broad ownership is also part of a mindset. As a client, when you talk to someone at the firm you know you are talking to an owner. For the owners, it creates a "greater fire in the belly" attitude towards your work.

Raper started Carter Ryley Thomas just a few short years ago with the goal and vision of creating a firm that would change the face of public relations and bring

fulfillment to its employees. Early on, its employees created a set of nine shared values that everyone in the company ascribes to and follows. "These shared values clearly has been what makes us unique," says Raper. "We truly try to make these values functioning and active. It puts faith back in people."

As they say, the proof is in the puddin'. Carter Ryley Thomas has grown dramatically since 1996 and has received numerous industry accolades. Closer to home, the Better Business Bureau recently awarded Carter Ryley Thomas with its regional *Torch Award for Marketplace Ethics*.

Carter Ryley Thomas is also a place where "good people do good things." The company's employees are encouraged to donate time to important community causes. In fact, the company closes for one full working day in December and employees spend the day at four or five different charitable organizations. It's called Community Service Day. "It's truly the best day of the year," says Raper. CARTER RYLEY THOMAS donates 10% of its after-tax profits to charitable organization and has 100% participation in the annual United Way campaign.

William Tyler, Xperts, Inc.

Xperts is a technology company that specializes in web-based technology solutions and technical staffing services. The company, founded in 1990 by William Tyler, has continued to prosper following Tyler's system of managed growth.

Xperts business model centers on core values, rather than core services offered. "It's a values-based business," explains Tyler. Xperts emphasizes quality of life for employees and supports this value in hundreds of little things that make a difference in the daily lives of the people who work there.

These values extend into the company's relationship with the community. In 1999, Tyler established Xperts.org, the company's nonprofit support program. Xperts' employees use the services offered by the company to advance the cause of nonprofit organizations.

One of the most exciting success stories for Xperts.org was helping to create the Microshaq Tech Center for the Boys & Girls Club of Metro Richmond. A panel of employees from Xperts helped the Club write the technology grant proposal. Xperts then donated the time and expertise to assess their needs, make recommendations, and implement the new equipment. The Microshaq Tech Center, one of only 14 in the country, is located on Bainbridge Street in South Richmond and provides disadvantaged youth with access to the latest computers, software and equipment.

Tyler feels that as the owner of a company he has a duty to instill community support and values throughout his organization. "It's an honor to be placed in this high esteem," says Tyler of his top five finish. "You work for years and you

don't see the incremental changes in your business. You don't realize that you really have done something."

Ting Xu, Frank Oiu, Evergreen Enterprises

Evergreen Enterprises designs, manufactures and distributes home and garden decoration accessories retail stores, catalogs and other distribution channels. Its products include appliquéd flags, ceramics, tile and rugs. Evergreen was started by Ting Xu seven years ago out of her garage and has enjoyed tremendous growth in sales and employees.

According to Ting Xu of Evergreen, the company relocated from Henrico County to the former Southgate Shopping Center, which was located in a depressed area off Midlothian Turnpike. Evergreen renovated 100,000 square foot vacant warehouse for its own operations, and made improvements to the remaining 60,000 square foot. This space is now home for a variety of other businesses such as a hair salon, restaurant, and computer renovation business. Thanks to the work of Evergreen, the area is safer and is a successful business location.

Evergreen's contributions have even been recognized outside of our country! Xu and her partner, Frank Oiu, were the recipients of the "Best Investment Award" by the Zhejiang Providence in China for creating hundreds of job opportunities and helping to improve the living standard of workers there. Xu explains that this award translates to an entrepreneur award in this country. Evergreen was also named number five Outdoor Décor vendor in the nation by trade magazine *Giftbeat*.

Chamber Initiative: Supporting Emerging Businesses

Small Business Development Center

So, what exactly is an "emerging" business? Peter Winters of the Greater Richmond Small Business Development Center (GRGRSBDC) says that with emerging businesses, as opposed to just a small business, "the emphasis is on growth. Just the word emerging speaks to a sense of moving forward."

The GRSBDC, as a program of the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce (GRCC), plays a critical role for many emerging businesses in the Richmond metropolitan area. Through its business preparation courses, one-on-one counseling and network of resources, the GRSBDC provides support to new and growing businesses so they can have a positive economic impact on the region. Winters says the primary service the GRSBDC offers these businesses is strategic and business planning. The GRSBDC also steps in when needed to help its clients solve critical business problems before they become detrimental.

One of the keys success factors for a growing, profitable business is a strategic business plan. The GRSBDC helps its clients think through all the important

components of owning and running a business. "About half of the businesses we work with have some sort of a plan, but often it's in need of work," explains Winters. "Our goal is to provide strategic direction to the firm so it can be profitable, using outside resources where needed. We try to raise the bar on companies' strategic planning skills so they can be more successful."

For businesses already in existence, the GRSBDC can be a resource for many of the tricky problems that plague business owners. For example, through its affiliations with a local law firm, the GRSBDC will help technology companies identify and take action regarding intellectual property issues. Or the GRSBDC will help an employer work through issues related the pros and cons of full-time employees versus outside contractors. Sometimes the help can be as simple as teaching the company how to write a press release or public service announcement.

According to Winters, the rapid success of an emerging business can also make it precarious. Once the company is in the position to win awards, such as the IMPACT Award, the growth may stretch the company's resources to point of breaking. Winters says the business can win awards, but it can just as easily unravel.

"At that rate of growth," Winters cautions, "the business really needs strategic planning. It has so many opportunities, which ones are best? It could really stumble. The business needs planning even more to keep focused on priorities instead of making decisions from the hip and falling apart."

Management Roundtables

The Chamber also helps emerging businesses through its strong networking opportunities and through programs such as its Management Roundtables. Management Roundtables provides business owners and their key managers with a format for discussing common problems in a frank, confidential format. Participants meet monthly in small groups to share insights and perspectives on running a business while gaining motivation from the success stories of others. Participants are divided into five categories: Chief Executive Officer; Chief Financial Officer; Office Manager; Human Resources Manager; and Sales Manager.

"It's a tremendously powerful program for the business executive or manager," said Rick Wildes, CPA, a past participant and current chair of the Management Roundtables committee. "I have gained more new business ideas and applications through my active participation in Management Roundtables than from all my other combined activities and associations."

With the benefit of input and expertise of others facing similar situations in the same marketplace, owners of emerging businesses can maximize their managerial talents.

Minority Business Directory

Another major initiative of the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce in support of emerging businesses is the region's first-ever minority business directory. Businesses owned by ethnic and racial minorities constitute one of the country's fastest growing business segments. The Minority Business Directory, published this summer by the Chamber and the Metropolitan Business League, directory provides one-stop information about products and services offered by minority-owned businesses in the Richmond area.

"It's extraordinarily important that the minority business community be able to contribute to and experience Greater Richmond's economic growth by providing business services and products where it can," said Jim Dunn, president of the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce. "The Minority Business Directory is the first directory to highlight minority-owned businesses in the Greater Richmond area in one central location and so is a valuable resource for enhancing our region's continuing success."

The Chamber, the Metropolitan Business League, the Greater Richmond Partnership, and other organizations will be distributing the directory to contacts all around the world as a way to promote Greater Richmond area minority businesses. The directory is available for purchase through the Chamber's Business Information Center.

The Rise & Fall, and Rise of Harley-Davidson

Witness the triumphs of a true global success story

There are lessons to be learned from the experiences of others. For the five finalists of this year's prestigious IMPACT Awards, and the rest of the Richmond business community, we will soon have the opportunity to learn how one corporate giant triumphed over adversity, a trait shared by many of this year's IMPACT Award nominees.

Attendees at the 2000 IMPACT Awards on October 26 will learn how Harley-Davidson, an internationally recognized brand and formidable force in the business world, enjoyed one of the most celebrated turnarounds in corporate history.

Keynote speaker Ken Schmidt, former director of communications for Harley-Davidson Motor Company, was instrumental in restoring the company's image with motorcyclists and the global public. He gradually restored market leadership and profitability to Harley-Davidson and today, the unique motorcycles outstrip supply worldwide. In his presentation, Schmidt will share the inside story of a company building an entirely new corporate culture, rekindling relationships with customers, and reaching out to new ones in completely untraditional ways.

Schmidt has enjoyed a successful career in corporate communications at Harley-Davidson, Bozell Public Relations, and VSA Partners, Inc., a Chicago-based marketing firm that counts General Motors, Coca-Cola, IBM, and Campbell Soup among its clients. Now Schmidt is a frequent speaker to business and academic audiences throughout the world and continues to provide marketing and communications expertise to several major brands, including Harley-Davidson.