

Three companies awarded at Business Recognition Luncheon

SPENCER – In showing appreciation for local business and industry, the Iowa Lakes Corridor held its second annual Business Recognition Luncheon on Oct. 12 at the Clay County Regional Events Center in Spencer. Part of the luncheon was to award three businesses in the following categories: Small Business Excellence (30 employees or fewer), Large Business Excellence (more than 30 employees) and Entrepreneur of the Year.

The Corridor requested nominations for the awards, and gave the nominations to a judging committee comprised of business and community leaders throughout the Corridor. The winners were announced at the luncheon. Businesses were nominated for various reasons: contribution to local economy, recent expansion, new product or service, customer service, management practices, and community involvement.

“It is important to recognize the contributions and economic impact our existing businesses have on our communities and region. Research shows that in an average sized community, approximately 80 percent of new jobs and capital investments are created by existing business and industry,” said Kathy Evert, president and CEO of the Iowa Lakes Corridor. “We have seen the truth in that with local companies hiring hundreds of employees over the past year.”



Skip and Joe Miller

Small Business Excellence was awarded to AERO Race Wheels of Estherville. In 1995, F.L. “Skip” Miller started the AERO Race Wheel product line as a division of Armstrong Rim and Wheel in Armstrong, Iowa. AERO occupies a 30,000 square foot manufacturing and warehouse facility and employs 20 people that produce up to 500 steel race wheels per day.

AERO is the wheel of choice for the majority of teams on the Sprint Cup and Nationwide circuit, and also a large number of teams on the Camping World Truck circuit as well. Since Nov. 2, 1997, AERO’s 59 Series NASCAR wheel has won more Cup, Nationwide and Truck races than all other brands combined.

The Large Business Excellence award was given to Nolin Milling of Dickens. Nolin Milling Inc. is a steel fabricator specializing in dry bulk material handling equipment including spouting, valves, slide gates, adjustable spout ends, and accessories. Other major product lines include industrial ductwork for air and dust handling. They sell equipment to millwright contractors, grain elevators and other processors. Nolin Milling Equipment is used in all 50 states and over 40 countries worldwide.



Karl, Carol and Brook Nolin

In 1974, Karl and Carol and the Nolin family formed Nolin Milling Inc., and built a soybean processing plant to produce oil and meal. In 1979 Nolin Milling Inc. started steel fabrication and printed its first price list offering material handling equipment. Karl and Carol's son, Brook, grew up with the company. After college, Brook joined the business in 1995. Their facilities are located on seventeen acres in Dickens, and have more than 100,000 square feet of manufacturing facilities.

Entrepreneur of the Year award was given to Kristy Henning of Estherville. For years Kristy Henning struggled with the choice between paper and plastic for transporting her fruits and vegetables home from the market. Feeling neither of these choices to be acceptable, she decided to find a third option. Her search for a reusable produce bag yielded unsatisfying results. Unlike cloth grocery bags suitable for carrying canned and boxed goods that are available in almost every food store, reusable produce bags are not readily available in most supermarkets, and those few grocery stores that do offer them sell bags sewn from fabrics that lack the quality and characteristics Henning prefers.



Kristy Henning

This void in the marketplace sparked the desire in Henning to create a produce bag that is strong and durable, enabling it to be used again and again, yet be lightweight and translucent. Her reusable produce bags would be manufactured using environmentally friendly materials and methods in a sustainable way and would be made in the United States.

Henning founded the company EcoSense in Estherville and prepared to manufacture and market BagAgain™ reusable produce bags. Months of searching for a suitable fabric that fulfilled all of her requirements came up empty, so she formed a relationship with an East coast company known for its innovation of unique fabrics. Together the two companies embarked on a one-year research project that, following four generations of product innovation and testing, yielded a fabric ideally suited for BagAgain reusable product bags.

BagAgain reusable produce bags are made from a unique fabric that is created from recycled water bottles. Additionally, the cording and tags are also from this type of recycled material and packaging materials are made from recycled paper. All of the elements of the bag are sourced in the U.S. and an Estherville company is looking at handling sewing and pack-off.

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The Iowa Lakes Corridor Development Corporation is the regional economic development agency for Buena Vista, Clay, Dickinson and Emmet counties. Its mission is to foster, encourage, aid, promote or otherwise assist in the economic growth and development of the region. For more information about the Iowa Lakes Corridor Development Corporation, call 712-264-3474 or visit www.lakescorridor.com.