

Businesses share success stories

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By Ashleigh Viveiros

Elias Woodworking and Manufacturing, Spenst Brothers Premium Meats and Wiebe Funeral Homes were honoured at this year's P.W. Enns Business Achievement Awards gala last week.

Hosted by the Winkler and District Chamber Commerce, the April 15 banquet gives the Chamber a chance to recognize those businesses who can serve as role models for success, said president Betty Hiebert.

"It's important to recognize them, and for other people to see that they started at the same place, and if they can do it, you can too," she said.

The winners are chosen for their superior customer service, dedication to quality, community involvement, and ongoing growth, among other attributes, Hiebert said.

"It's very specific to businesses that want to grow and that are innovative," she said of the awards. "This year, it was very much businesses that we saw that started small and have grown."

AWARD WINNERS

Up first to receive a 2010 P.W. Enns Business Builder Award for companies with fewer than 10 employees was Wiebe's Funeral Homes.

Owner Rick Wiebe received the award on behalf of his company, noting that it's the compassionate work of his employees that have helped make Wiebe's Funeral Homes so successful.

"The people that are so important to the success of our profession ... are my great funeral directors," he said, going on to thank all of his staff.

Wiebe's Funeral Homes was started by Wiebe's father, Nick, in 1949 in Winkler. In the 60 years since, the business has grown to include funeral homes and services in Morden and Altona.

Wiebe said his father would have been proud to see how far the company has come over the last several decades.

"It's such an honour to receive this award. My dad would be so proud," he said.

Next, receiving a 2010 P.W. Enns Business Builder Award for companies with more than 10 employees, was Spenst Brothers Premium Meats.

What began as a way for the Spenst family - who own a cattle operation south of Winkler - to weather the 2003 BSE crisis has turned into a successful family-run business, employing 30 people.

But it hasn't always been easy - success came only after a lot of hard work, said Connie Spenst.

"Starting up a new business did not come without its share of challenges," she said. "After all, what did we know about making pepperoni or bologna?"

"The learning curves have been huge," Spenst said. "(But) we are a farm family and hard work and long hours have always been a part of our life."

Spenst said success of the meat shop went beyond any expectations the family had when it opened, thanks solely to the ongoing support of the community.

"We are grateful to the people of Winkler and the surrounding area who come up to our doors and keep them open for us," she said. "It's a pleasure to serve you."

Finally, accepting the sixth annual P.W. Enns Business Excellence Award on behalf of Elias Woodworking and Manufacturing was owner Ralph Fehr.

Fehr and his brother purchased the small cabinet door manufacturing company in 1983, and moved it to Winkler.

In the years since, the company has moved into progressively larger buildings, culminating with its current 98,000 square foot facility.

With its state-of-the-art, automated equipment, the company has been able to remain viable, even in light of recent global economic woes.

It's been a tough couple of years, Fehr said, but they've managed to work on improving the business in that time, and have signed on a lot of corporate clients which, when the economy improves, will keep things busier than ever at Elias.

Fehr thanked his staff - the company currently employs over 200 people - for their dedication to the company.

"They're responsible for our business' success, certainly," he said. "I am personally very grateful for the people that I work with. They are the people that make it happen."

GROWING COMMUNITIES

Rounding out the awards gala was a presentation from Steinbach Mayor Chris Goertzen.

Goertzen outlined many of the similarities Winkler and Steinbach share, including the challenges the two communities face as their populations continue to grow.

Like Winkler, Steinbach - which has a population of about 13,000 and counting - has benefited greatly from the influx of new immigrants, Goertzen said.

It has helped to create a richer, more diverse city, he said.

But with growth comes the need to improve infrastructure, add new services, and grow the business community - all without losing sight of the city's roots, Goertzen said.

"The challenge when you're a small community is you want to keep the small town feel, but have the big city amenities," he said.

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