

Big Chamber Feel

On Wednesday, May 14 the Chamber held its annual Business of the Year luncheon at Tampa Bay Downs. Chamber President/CEO Jerry Custin said "this is one of my favorite lunches of the year as we take the time not only to identify some of the best businesses in our community, but also stop to realize what a great business environment we enjoy." Awards are given in small, medium and large business categories depending on the amount of annual revenue produced. This year a new category was created, The Emerging Entrepreneur *continued on page 16*



Sue Gianelli, Beverly Benjamin, Jeff Copeland (2007 winner) Beth Leto & Kerry Riekofski with their 2008 Business of the Year award.

Big Chamber *continued from page 1*

Award. Our winners go on to compete against other chamber nominees for recognition as the Upper Pinellas Business of the Year later this fall. A panel composed of six member business principals selected our winners in this demanding competition.

The small business category is for businesses producing up to \$999,999 in annual revenues. The nominees included: Re/Max Power Advantage, Lori Polin, P.A. and Kasco Stone, the 2008 winner. Kathy and Scott McGourley (KASCO) bought excess material for a home project and grew the business out of their driveway. They were recognized for their outstanding community support participating in the Great American Teach-In discussing their knowledge of rocks, gems and minerals. Scott is an industry leader in tools and seamless joints and recently hosted the national Stone Fabricators Workshop. Last year's winner Steve Summers (Pitch Publicity, Inc.) presented the award.

The medium business encompasses firms producing revenues between \$1 million to \$5 million in annual revenues. Our nominees were Residence Inn Marriott and Arthur Air Conditioning. Patty Pilz, representing last year's winner West Bay Rehabilitation and

Nursing Center presented the 2008 award to Arthur Air Conditioning. Randy Arthur has owned and operated his business for twenty years and works with no sub-contractors, only full time licensed installers.

Arthur Air has experienced double digit growth the last three years with their focus on quality, preventive maintenance and "green". Randy rode 200



"Entrepreneur of the Year" WestFetch owner Craig Muniz

miles in support for Muscular Sclerosis research and is an American Red Cross volunteer. With their priority being customer service, they offer immediate response to callers and use no voice mail for messages.

Our large business of the year (exceeding \$5 million in earning)

nominations included some great businesses in our community including Home Pro, Incorporated and Leader Tech with Aston Gardens winning this year's top honors. Jeff Copeland representing last year's OneSimpleLoan presented the 2008aAward to Beth Leto, Community Relations Director. Aston Gardens caters to senior needs including their physical, social and mental well being offering outside the box senior education programs.

One of six Aston communities in Florida, it was founded by former Navy pilots with family experience. The recent sale of the property proved to be a smooth transition from family-owned to large corporation that was accomplished with no turnover and no transition in values. They are committed to several charities including, but not limited to, the Cancer Society, Red Cross, Leukemia, Alzheimer's, Hospice, Helping Hands and the Alpha House.

This year we opened the competition up to Entrepreneur Of The Year, operating less than three years with the following criteria: Product/service

innovation; be independently owned; provide a well documented plan to identify and control risks while improving profitability with a clear focus on growth potential. The 2008 winner is WestFetch. Owner Craig Muniz was working in the corporate world and decided to capitalize on the hectic schedules of modern life. His concierge services began growing rapidly as he focused on multiple 'targets'...



2008 "Small Business of the Year" winners Kathy & Scott McGourley (KASCO Stone) with Steve Summers (Pitch Publicity, Inc.)

seniors, working couples, individuals and businesses. WestFetch offers a wide range of services including "Fetching",

pet sitting and boarding, mobile notary, pressure washing and even eBay trading. He is contemplating the benefits of developing franchise opportunities and we couldn't be more supportive of those efforts.



Patty Pilz (Westbay Rehabilitation & Nursing) with 2008 "Medium Business of the Year" winner Randy & Kathy Arthur (Arthur Air Conditioning)

Custin turned the meeting over to Bruce Walling, representative for the Chamber Education Foundation who introduced the May Student of the Month from Lowry Elementary, fifth grade student Matthew Borges. Guidance Counselor Doris Field described the reasons Matthew was chosen to receive this award. "Matthew has shown tremendous improvement and determination this year. Matthew struggled at the beginning of the year trying to adapt to the life of a fifth grader, but quickly found his way. With a lot of hard work and dedication Matthew has been able to maintain a

good grade in a subject that he struggles with. Matthew constantly works hard toward his goal and asks questions when he doesn't understand a lesson (a quality of a great student). He is also willing to help other students when he does understand the material. We are all proud of the hard work Matthew has put in this year at Lowry Elementary."

The Upper Tampa Bay Regional Chamber of Commerce places great value on personal relationships - not just business contacts. President/CEO Jerry Custin describes it best..."The regional nature of the chamber is reflected by our winners. The quality of all our nominees certainly bears witness to this community having big chamber services. The quality of our youth bears witness to our commitment to community. Now that is the small chamber feel at its best. We are blessed to live in such a dynamic community."



"Student of the Month" Matthew Borges