

CEDR celebrates Clatsop's entrepreneurs

By Edward Stratton

The Daily Astorian | Posted: Thursday, March 20, 2014 1:36 pm

"I can't believe how far we've come in just a few years," said Skip Hauke, a board member who helped found Clatsop Economic Development Resources more than six years ago. "When we kicked CEDR off, those few short years ago, there were 22 economic development committees in Clatsop County.

Organizers took all that information and enthusiasm, said Hauke, and started CEDR.

On Wednesday night in the Liberty Theater, the county's official economic development group honored the business leaders of Astoria, large and small, during its second annual Outstanding Business awards ceremony.

For the Economic Development Award, CEDR chose one of the largest employers in the county, one that stuck it out, even when it burned to the ground.

"They could have said 'We're out of here,'" said Kevin Leahy after the ceremony of why the Pacific Seafoods was a crystal-clear choice for the award. The plant employs about 150 people year-round and an addition 130 eight months out of the year,

After its Pacific Coast Seafoods plant burned down June 4, the company opened 11 days later at North Tongue Point in an unoccupied former seaplane hangar leased by Del Mar Seafoods.

"Not only have they gone through great lengths to keep their regular staff employed and clean up, but they've hired a lot – a lot – of local businesses to help with their subsequent move to Tongue Point," said Leahy shortly before bringing up Mike Brown, general manager of Pacific Coast Seafoods.

Brown credited the company's team for the award.

"Pacific Coast Seafoods was the first processing facility acquired by Pacific Seafoods back in 1983, a little over 30 years ago," said Brown. "And we've invested in creating jobs and giving back to the community."

Business service

The night was about both impact on the economy and in the community. And possibly the most visible example of business philanthropy in Clatsop County is the Lum's Auto Center, which won the Business Service to the Community award for large businesses.

Founded in Astoria 1969 by the now 80-year-old George Award winner David Lum, the company's name and family owners have become synonymous with such words as "donate," "fundraiser" and "volunteer" in the region. They give time, money, space and even cars to every conceivable community effort and volunteer board.

Lum, who retired in 2000 and passed the business' operation onto his daughters Julie, Lori and Pamela, dedicated the award to his mother, an American-born Chinese from California who came to Astoria at age 16 in 1914 for a prearranged marriage to his father, an Astorian since 1894. She was widowed a mother of six at age 47, said Lum, without Social Security or the ability to read or write in English or Chinese. But she strived to get her children an education and a better life.

"I think that some of these awards indicate that we give back to the community because we appreciate," said Lum, remarking that although he may look a foreigner, he's probably the oldest American in the room. "I'm so glad I was born in America."

Karen Emmerling's Beach Books in Seaside took home the Business Service to the Community award for small businesses.

Among other efforts, Beach Books erects a wishing tree during the holidays to support Seaside School District, opens the store to local artists and visiting authors and holds book drives for various groups.

Emmerling, who also won the Seaside's Rotary Club High Ethical Standards Award last year and serves on the Seaside Downtown Development Association, thanked the people who still shop small in the age of big box stores.

Entrepreneurship

Seaside hotelier Masudur Khan over the last five years has quietly built a multi-location empire. His third venture, the 48-room River Inn at Seaside, will likely cost \$4.2 million and is expected to open in May.

"More than 60 percent of the subcontractors are from our local area," said Leahy, adding that Khan responds to requests from local schools and charities. "This will add 10 to 12 full-time jobs and three to five part-time positions in the new hotel by the end of April."

His Inn at Seaside employs 18 full-time employees, while the recently purchased City Center Motel contributes another five.

Khan, who moved to Seaside from Michigan five years ago, described the North Coast's unparalleled natural beauty as a main tourist draw.

"We need to stick together, work together to bring more guests to this county so that we can retain our business and grow more jobs," said Khan, who dedicated the award to his employees.

Luke Colvin, the owner of Arbor Care Tree Specialists and an investor and founder in Buoy Beer, took home the Entrepreneurship award for small businesses.

Leahy said Arbor Care's expanded south to Florence, north to Olympia, Wash., and east to Portland, providing family-wage jobs with benefits and retirements and raising the equivalent of 60,000 pounds

of food through its Stuff the Truck food drives at Fred Meyer since 2008.

“Both my teams at Arbor Care and Buoy Beer deserve a lot of credit for this,” said Colvin, who also thanked his wife and father for their support and guidance.

Innovation and preservation

Clatsop County lacks many high-skilled, high-wage industries. But Lektro established itself entirely at the Astoria Regional Airport in 1948 and has been turning out electric vehicles there ever since, including more than 4,300 of its famous electric aircraft tugs.

Owner Eric Paulson, son of the founders Wilt and Violet Paulson and head of the company since 1982 at age 19, accepted the Technological and Manufacturing Advancement award Wednesday.

“Manufacturing is kind of a dying breed,” he said. “And, of course, being in Clatsop County, it’s not like we’re harvesting logs and then going out to the local river to produce our product. We bring all the raw steel in, raw materials in. And we build our products here, design them here and ship them from here.”

The certification with Boeing and Airbus of its latest model, the AP8950 built to serve narrow-bodied commercial jets of up to 186,000 pounds, has the potential to quadruple its sales and grow its workforce, which Leahy said is now 70 full-timers with an annual payroll of \$3 million. The company, Leahy added, has more than 220 Oregon and Southwest Washington companies from which it bought \$6 million in supplies in the last year.

Business at Lektro, added Leahy, is up 50 percent so far in 2014 and could double by year’s end. Paulson said smaller, narrow-body commercial jets represent 80 percent of the market, which Lektro will continue attacking.

For its efforts in resurrecting Seaside’s former city hall, jail and firehouse, Jimmy Griffin and Vince Berg of Seaside Brewing were winners of the Entrepreneurship award for small businesses.

“Of all the awards we could have been given, this means the most to us,” said Griffin. “We really did pour our heart and souls into the building. Really, to us, that’s what craft beer is all about. It’s soul.”

Berg and Griffin left Rogue Brewery to start a brewery in Seaside, but ended up adding a restaurant and pub into the mix. They recently upgraded from a one- to 15-barrel brewing system and have put Seaside on the North Coast Craft Beer Trail.

CEDR’s next Outstanding Business Awards ceremony, said Leahy, lands on March 18 in the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.