



News Release

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U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND LOS ANGELES AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HONOR SMALL BUSINESSES ACCELERATING ECONOMIC RECOVERY

*28th Annual Small Business Awards Recognize 17 Local Entrepreneurs and Small Business
Champions in conjunction with National Small Business Week Observance*

LOS ANGELES, CA. – The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) today announced the Los Angeles District Office winners of the 28th Annual Small Business Awards co-sponsored by the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce.

This year's competition presents awards to 17 entrepreneurs and small business champions in the Los Angeles area who are helping to power the regional economy and accelerate economic recovery. The luncheon, awards presentation and networking reception is scheduled for Wednesday, June 17 from 11:00 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel at 506 South Grand Avenue in downtown Los Angeles.

Entrepreneurs and small business owners from various industries competed from Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara counties and were nominated by local trade associations, chambers of commerce and business organizations. Local winners continued onto the regional and national level with the finalist honored at the White House with President Obama and SBA Administrator Karen Mills. A full listing of the 2009 award winners with bios is available at: <http://www.sba.gov/ca/la/index.html>.

“The entrepreneurial spirit lies at the core of our Nation's economy and identity...during National Small Business Week, we honor the entrepreneurs and small business owners who are the engine of our economy. Their ingenuity and hard work are critical to our Nation's prosperity,” said President Obama.

“The SBA commends the 2009 winners for their hard work and dedication,” said Alberto G. Alvarado, Los Angeles SBA district director. “Their success is a testament to what can be achieved in the face of adversity and to the innovative spirit of entrepreneurs everywhere. These local small businesses are pointing the way to our economic recovery.”

“Small businesses are a key driver of our economy,” said Gary Toebben, President & CEO, Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. “The L.A. Area Chamber is proud to serve small businesses, and we applaud this year's award winners for their contributions in helping to accelerate economic recovery.”

The 2009 Small Business Awards luncheon is made possible in part through the contributions of supporters including: Bank of America; Southwest Airlines; Union Bank of California; Wedbush Bank; Wells Fargo; Beach Business Bank; CDC Small Business Finance; East West Bank; Excel National Bank; Royal Business Bank; Metropolitan Water District of Southern California; SBDC Lead Center – Los Angeles Regional Network; Valley Economic Development Center (VEDC); Verizon and several other supporting organizations.

The 2009 Small Business Award Winners include:

Small Business Person of the Year	Leonard Ortiz Lenova (Cerritos, CA)
SBA Young Entrepreneur of the Year	Samira Asemanfar Bellacures (Beverly Hills, CA)
Innovation Through Technology Business of the Year	Edwin Cheung & Karrie Chan Rabbit Air (Downey, CA)
Environmental “Green” Conservator of the Year	Allen Haskell & Herminia Rivera Haskell Cater Green! Zero Waste Solutions (Los Angeles, CA)
Family-Owned Business of the Year	The Contos Family Golden Star Family Restaurants (Long Beach, CA)
Small Business Journalist of the Year	Nancy Thyme Lomita-Harbor Connection (Torrance, CA)
Export Lender of the Year Award	Bernd Hermann World Trade Finance, Inc. (Glendale, CA)
Women in Business Champion	Jane Skeeter UltraGlas, Inc. (Chatsworth, CA)
Veteran Small Business Champion	James Cragg Special Operations Technologies (Carson, CA)
Home-Based Business Champion	Connie Sparks Wade Institute (Castaic, CA)
Financial Services Champion	Brian Carlson Excel National Bank (Beverly Hills, CA)
Minority Small Business Champion	Sandy Cajas Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (Long Beach, CA)
	Frank Quevedo Southern California Edison (Rosemead, CA)
SBDC Service Center Excellence	College of the Canyons SBDC (Santa Clarita, CA) Steven Tannehill, Director
WBC Center of Excellence	Pacific Asian Consortium in Employment (PACE) (Los Angeles, CA) Jacquelyn Jones, Director

The SBA Los Angeles District Office is ranked “No.1” in the country in lending and oversees SBA programs to over 12 million people in Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties. The office manages a total loan portfolio that finances more than 3,700 businesses and nearly \$1 billion yearly and generates annual contract procurements of \$589 million. In addition, the District Office supervises seven Small Business Development Centers, coordinates four chapters of the Service Corps of Retired Executives and oversees five Women’s Business Centers.

The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce is the largest business association in Los Angeles County serving more than 1,600 member companies and the interests of more than 235,000 businesses across the county. The mission of the L.A. Area Chamber is to ensure full economic prosperity and quality of life in the region by being the voice of business, promoting collaboration and helping members grow.

The U.S. Small Business Administration’s participation in this cosponsored activity does not constitute an express or implied endorsement of any cosponsor’s, donor’s, grantee’s, contractor’s or participant’s opinions, products, or services. All SBA programs and cosponsored programs are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis. Reasonable arrangements for persons with disabilities will be made, if requested at least 2 weeks in advance, by contacting sbw@sba.gov. Cosponsorship Authorization #SBW2009

The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce represents the interests of business in L.A. County. Founded in 1888, the Chamber promotes a prosperous economy and quality of life in the Los Angeles region. For more information, visit www.lachamber.com.

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2009 SMALL BUSINESS WEEK AWARD WINNERS

Small Business Person of the Year – Leonard Ortiz Founder and President/CEO of Lenova (Cerritos, CA)

Leonard Ortiz is President and CEO of Lenova, a general contractor specializing in superior floor coatings and coverings. Ortiz is a Los Angeles native, who keeps his business and staffing local but has contracts throughout the United States. The business started with just two employees, but with a current staff of 25, sales are now skyrocketing. His belief is that “success is only achieved when preparation meets opportunity and that to achieve true success, one must stay focused on the goal.” Ortiz is also a believer in giving back - he works with the small business community via speaking engagements and is currently heading efforts to create a scholarship fund that is jointly funded by both the California Black Chamber of Commerce and the Latin Business Association that will target disadvantaged youths who have promising potential.

SBA Young Entrepreneur of the Year – Samira Asemanfar Owner and Founder of Bellacures (Beverly Hills, CA)

Bellacures is now a well recognized name in the Los Angeles area when it comes to manicures and pedicures. The salon was founded by 26-year-old Samira Asemanfar, who got the idea for her nail salon while working toward her Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration, which she received from USC in 2004. In February of 2006, she gathered money from family, friends and credit cards to launch Bellacures. One of the unique aspects of Bellacures is the “spa like” atmosphere - high ceilings, oversized ultra-suede chairs and relaxing color schemes. In addition, the professional staff pays meticulous attention to cleanliness. Asemanfar crossed paths with the SBA when she was nominated by her attorney for Small Business Week’s Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award. After speaking with Asemanfar, the district office asked if the SBA could assist her in any other way - she asked for information on franchising. The district office directed her to a firm that specializes in franchising companies and Asemanfar was able to negotiate a deal with the company to help her expand her successful prototype.

Innovation Through Technology Business of the Year – Karrie Chan & Edwin Cheung, Co-owners and Founders of Rabbit Air (Downey, CA)

Co-founded by Edwin Cheung and Karrie Chan in 2001, Rabbit Air designs and manufactures high-quality HEPA air purifiers to improve the lives of those suffering from allergies, asthma and other environmental sensitivities. The advanced air purification system is as aesthetically pleasing as it is healthful in purging the air of 99.97 percent of allergens and pollutants. Both Cheung and Chan believe that air purification is a science as well as an art and combine extensive research with innovative design. Rabbit Air products have been featured in numerous magazine articles and on a television show featuring hot new products. Sales have increased more than 150% in the past two years. Rabbit Air also has a commitment to quality customer service, offering 24-hour technical support along with a five-year warranty on all their products. The employees also contribute to the company’s innovation and are treated as family - communication is a top priority. A recently launched special edition product donates five percent of all sales to The Breast Cancer Research Foundation.

Environmental "Green" Conservator of the Year – Allan Haskell and Herminia Rivera, Co-owners and Founders of CaterGreen! Zero Waste Solutions (Los Angeles, CA)

The idea for Catergreen! Zero Waste Solution started in 2005 from a City of Los Angeles environmental project. After the project, Herminia and Allan continued their environmental work and took their environmental expertise to a local SCORE and Women’s Business Center office. Soon after, they launched their business and have become gurus for environmentally conscious and socially responsible businesses in Southern California. The company offers zero waste guidance, research, resources, and “greening” practices for food establishments and other businesses, festivals and events. By providing everything from recycled post-consumer packaging and bags to compost-able utensils, containers and cups, Herminia and Allan have earned accolades from their clients who want to make a difference and attract environmentally conscious consumers. In four years, they have helped reduce businesses’ impact on the environment. Catergreen was instrumental in getting a local, hands-on food training program to “go green” – which then became a model for other businesses to follow.

Family-Owned Business of the Year – The Contos Family

Owner and Founder of Golden Star Family Restaurant (Long Beach, CA)

Golden Star Family Restaurant has been in operation for more than 46 years. The family owned and operated restaurant is in its second generation of family where everyone pitches in to make the business a satisfying experience for both owners and customers. When curious customers ask family member why they don't take time off weekends or holidays, they simply state, "some of the customers don't have families, so on these days, including Christmas and New Year's, we get to be their family." Their love of family extends to the community - they are constantly working with and donating their culinary delights to the local schools and churches. They have expanded their enterprise to two restaurants and will open a third one this year.

Small Business Journalist of the Year – Nancy "Liberty" Thyme

Editor and Founder of Lomita-Harbor Connection (Torrance, CA)

In January of 2007, Nancy "Liberty" Thyme launched Lomita-Harbor Connection from her home using just a desktop computer. She jumped at the opportunity to fill a news void in the Los Angeles Harbor City/Harbor Gateway corridor "to help the residents, organizations, and businesses communicate and connect by providing information on local events, city government, business, schools, sports, history, food for thought, good news and community spirit." With no journalism experience to draw from and lofty goals, Thyme overcame the challenges of learning new skills, finding freelance writers and finding individuals to do the layout and design all with virtually no start up capital. Using her experience from years of community service from groups including the Kiwanis Club and two local chambers of commerce, she brought to life a local community newspaper (and website) delivered free to homes and businesses. Currently, the paper has a circulation of approximately 20,000 and estimated readership of 60,000. The paper is published and distributed monthly, and Thyme is working toward making regular online updates featuring current community news.

National SBA Export Lender of the Year – Bernd Hermann

President, World Trade Finance, Inc. (Glendale, CA)

World Trade Finance, Inc. is the SBA's National Winner for Export Lender of the Year and the largest SBA Export Working Capital Program lender in California. The bank was founded in 1989 in Glendale with a nationwide loan territory. World Trade Finance, Inc. focuses on small and medium-sized manufacturers and service businesses and specializes in pre-shipment export working capital loans. Bernd's extensive experience on both sides of the table - as CFO/borrower/exporter and lender - makes him a valuable partner for his export clients.

Women in Business Champion of the Year – Jane Skeeter

Owner and Founder of UltraGlas, Inc. (Chatsworth, CA)

Jane Skeeter founded UltraGlas, Inc. in 1987 to expand her talent and experience acquired fabricating artistic stained, leaded and etched glass. An innovator in the architectural glass business from her earliest days, Skeeter became one of the first licensed female glazing contractors in Los Angeles. Driven by her pioneering spirit and appreciation for the architectural functions and artistic qualities of glass, Jane traveled to Europe in the mid 80's to investigate the latest glass technology. From her travels, she was inspired to create decorative architectural glass via a technique called "kiln-forming," which uses a heat slumping (embossing) process. Not only did Skeeter improve upon the process but made UltraGlas, Inc. an internationally-acclaimed supplier of glass products to hotels, resorts, cruise ships, casinos, theme parks, restaurants and museums. The glass work created by her team of expert artists now extends beyond traditional glass applications and enriches doors, tile, flooring, signage, lighting, art sculpture, theme walls, murals and furniture. Skeeter is also a member of numerous organizations and is currently the President of the Los Angeles Chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners.

Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year – James Cragg

Owner and Founder of Special Operations Technologies, Inc. (Carson, CA)

Eleven years ago, Army Reserve Capt. James Cragg started his business Special Operations Technologies, Inc. with a sewing machine and \$200 worth of cloth after he realized Army gear didn't fit well. Using sewing skills acquired in a junior high school home-economics class he focused on military gear for himself and friends. Today, the company is a multi-million dollar manufacturing operation in the military and adventure sports market with over 900 military and law enforcement products including packs, medical kits and aviation systems. As a former active duty Army officer, Cragg had leadership skills and plenty of ideas for gear but no real business education. The initial help came from the Santa Monica College Small Business Development Center, which provided marketing, sales and product design/development counseling. Under a \$15 million U.S. Army contract, Cragg equipped every Army Special Operations soldier with a medical kit. Cragg has also established a vocational rehabilitation program that assists disabled veterans returning to the workforce by teaching them trade skills and providing them with a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of being "back on the team."

Home-Based Business Champion of the Year – Connie Sparks

Owner and Founder of Wade Institute (Castaic, CA)

Connie Sparks founded what would eventually become Wade Institute in October 2000 after she found local agencies unwilling to help with a previous enterprise. Currently, the Institute offers a variety of customized small business development programs designed to empower women in business. The Institute focuses on entrepreneurial programs and has trained more than 4,000 home-based and small business owners throughout California, including single parents and students who want to earn residual income. Sparks credits her family - especially her grandmother - for helping her belief in herself and the passion for helping others find their way in the world. Through intensive strategic planning workshops and innovative hands-on seminars the Institute creates business solutions tailored for the individual business owner. In March 2009, the Institute launched a capital development department through a new stand alone company called Community Capital Lending Services, which now offers SBA, commercial, private and realty lending services. Sparks' 15 years experience in business service, management, program development and human resources has helped place thousands of home-based businesses on the path to success.

Financial Services Champion of the Year – Brian Carlson

President and CEO of Excel National Bank (Beverly Hills, CA)

Brian Carlson is President and CEO of Excel National Bank, established in 2005. Carlson is adamant about helping clients achieve their slice of the American Dream. Specializing in Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, Excel's team of top-notch experts regularly help a variety of businesses, from motels and gas stations to professional groups such as medical, dental and law practices. By helping their clients navigate the SBA loan process, small businesses get the financing they need to start, grow and expand their operations. With \$120 million in assets and \$250 million in business loans, Excel also works with all aspects of their banking needs, including comprehensive retail banking services and business, construction and commercial real estate loans.

Minority Small Business Champions of the Year (tie) – Sandy Cajas

President and CEO of Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (Long Beach, CA)

Sandy Cajas is President and CEO of the Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (RHCC) for Los Angeles. Cajas has more than 15 years of expertise as a small business owner herself. Through her ongoing efforts in the marketing and advertising of multi-ethnic events and fundraisers, the RHCC is a strong advocate for small business, providing advice and information about financial and procurement opportunities, technical assistance and legislative initiatives and actions. RHCC's program "Success Through Diversity" has successfully matched small businesses with governmental agencies for contracts and procurement opportunities. In addition, international trade is a strong component of the portfolio of services that enables further growth for small businesses. Cajas has a strong commitment to underserved markets. "Not only does the Regional Hispanic Chamber give small businesses viability in the business community, it gives them a voice, unity and strength."

Minority Small Business Champions of the Year (tie) – Frank Quevedo

Retired Vice President of Equal Opportunity at Southern California Edison. (Rosemead, CA)

Frank Quevedo was the Vice President of Equal Opportunity at Southern California Edison. Now retired, Quevedo was responsible for guiding an organization focused on work-force diversity and equal opportunity for all employees while fostering a nondiscriminatory work environment that ensures the company benefits from the skill and experiences of all its employees. With his professional acumen, he has been a tireless minority activist who earned the reputation for being a strong proponent of inclusion of minority business enterprises, the empowerment of ethnic business communities and for being an effective advocate of economic justice issues at the local and national level. Diversity outreach at Southern California Edison has resulted in partnerships with associations including the: National Black Business Association, Latin Business Association, Asian Business Association, California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and California Black Chambers of Commerce. Quevedo has been recognized for his insight and the creativity in bringing government, business and minorities together.

Small Business Development Center – Service Excellence and Innovation Award

College of the Canyons SBDC (Santa Clarita, CA)

The College of the Canyons SBDC serves the valleys of Antelope, Santa Clarita and San Fernando. SBDCs are funded by the SBA to provide workshops/training for free or low cost and provide free one-on-one business counseling. The College of the Canyons SBDC has consistently performed above established milestones. With the expertise of its counselors, it has been involved in the creation of 15 new businesses, logged \$1.9 million in sales increases, more than \$1.1 million in total loans, and \$325,000 in equity-cash infusion. The College of the Canyons SBDC also started “Masterminds,” a program where members focus on supporting each other through open discussion and collaboration to increase the breadth of their institutional knowledge and successful business practices. In addition, the College of the Canyons SBDC is developing a technology incubator that will provide a state of the art facility to help launch and grow new businesses.

Women's Business Center of Excellence Award –

Pacific Asian Consortium in Employment (PACE) (Los Angeles, CA)

For the past 30 years, Pacific Asian Consortium in Employment (PACE) has served the Pacific Asian and other diverse communities. In 2004, PACE was given the opportunity to serve as a SBA Women’s Business Center (WBC). The WBC offers workshops and training for free or low cost and provides free one-on-one business counseling. PACE has been innovative in developing specialty training in finance, marketing and business planning and has ongoing mentoring for clients. PACE also created a program to recruit and train volunteers and match them up with aspiring entrepreneurs. They also provide training for the SBA 8(a) certification program, contract procurement, loan packaging, financial education, credit repair and a specialized program of Individual Development Accounts to ensure that clients get ongoing and continued support for their business needs. The center counsels both men and women, with a focus on women. Many of their clients live and work in underserved areas.