

BUSINESS CENTS

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Special Points of Interest

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- List of local winners
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- Spotlight: Pittsburgh District Office ADD and the Central Pennsylvania SCORE Chapter

Helping small businesses **start**, **grow** and **succeed**.



Your Small Business Resource

ENGINEERING AN AWARD-WINNING COMPANY

In 1991, Joseph Keller, a civil engineer by trade with 15 years of experience, found himself back in school at Saint Francis University in Loretto, Pa.

Keller wasn't interested in earning a master's degree, instead, he utilized the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) located at the university and funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Keller wanted to open his own engineering firm and needed information.

According to Keller, Mr. Barry Surma of the St. Francis SBDC provided him with the pros and cons of running his own business.

"Barry gave me recommendations and helped me write a business plan," Kel-



Pittsburgh District Director Carl Knoblock and state winner Joseph Keller of Keller Engineers, Inc. at the 2008 Small Business Week luncheon.

ler said. "He made me be realistic on what to expect the first year when I would have little or no clients or money...he didn't paint a rosy picture."

Some 17 years later Keller's leadership skills, coupled with his community involvement, would garner both local and state awards from the U.S. Small Business Administration as the Western Pennsylvania Small Business Person of the Year and the state Small Business Person of the Year.

Not bad for the sole employee when Keller Engineers, Inc. opened its doors in 1991.

"I was just happy to stay in business and never set any goals except to steadily grow", he stated. "And

our plan was to become active in community involvement.

"Each year, we try to do a project," he said. "Last year we did a little league field and we hold a golf tournament to raise money."

Today, the firm is comprised of 56 employees with offices in three states

Keller maintains the award is a tribute to the whole company.

"I was surprised and really honored to win the awards", he said. "Pennsylvania is a pretty big state and I was happy for me and the company."

MY TWO CENTS WORTH... NOTES FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR



Carl Knoblock, District Director

“Their success is a reflection of our combined accomplishments.”

A quick glance in Webster’s Dictionary provided me with a definition for the word “winner” and that is “one of exceptionally superior quality or character”. To me, that’s a pretty adequate description of the 10 local individuals we honored this May during national small business week.

It wasn’t just the winners we applauded, but, rather the whole small business community within Western Pennsylvania. These winners just didn’t become an overnight success story. They relied on their ingenuity; hard

work and support from family, friends and the small business community.

Their success is a reflection of our combined accomplishments.

For instance, 17 years ago Mr. Joseph Keller, the state winner and 2008 Western Pennsylvania Small Business Person of the Year, received assistance from Mr. Barry Surma at the Saint Francis Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Barry, who now is the director of finance and development programs with the Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation, provided guidance on business plans and financial proposals. According to Joe Keller, Barry became a necessary second set of eyes and was instrumental with the development of Keller Engineers Inc.

Peter Lambert, our Young Entrepreneur of the Year, initially received business basics guidance from our SCORE resource partners to start his one-man blacksmith shop. Now, some seven years later, Peter is working closely with Ray Vargo, interim director at the University of Pittsburgh’s SBDC. Together they are exploring financing avenues available to Peter so he can purchase his shop in Millvale and create an atmosphere conducive to the artisans he employs.

And small business week doesn’t just honor persons fabricating a product or providing a service; champions also are lauded for their efforts. A good example is Brent Rondon, manager of the Global Business Program at Duquesne University SBDC. He received both the Pittsburgh and regional award as the Minority Small Business Champion of the Year. Brent came to this country 16 years ago and didn’t speak English.

SMALL BUSINESS COMMUNITY BREEDS SUCCESS

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He not only had to find a job, but learn our complex language and culture as well. Today, he's in a position to reach out and help minorities to grow and learn our system. He routinely fields calls from newcomers and offers his friendship often explaining things we take for granted such as how credit works.

Watching the videos enabled everyone to see just how important small business is to the economic landscape of our region and nation.

As the SBA Pittsburgh district director, each day I get the opportunity to meet people who want to take their vision and skills to the next level and start their own business. And small business success stories wouldn't be possible without our Western Pennsylvania Small Business Network.

The 2008 Small Business Week award winners are: Joseph Keller, Small Business Person of the Year; Brent G. Rondon, Minority Small Business Champion of the Year;

Dan Richey, Small Business Journalist Champion of the Year; Peter Lambert, Young Entrepreneur of the Year; Alan Smith, Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year; Susan Breon, Women in Business Champion of the Year; Dennis Piper, Financial Services Champion of the Year; Sauereisen, Family-Owned Business of the Year; Amy Veltri, Woman-Owned Business of the Year and Donald Carpenter, SCORE Volunteer of the Year.

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NOTES FROM THE FIELD: PITTSBURGH DO ACTING DDD AND CENTRAL PENNA SCORE CHAPTER



Central Pennsylvania SCORE chapter members pose with Chairperson Sara Parks during their monthly June meeting. The Central Pennsylvania chapter couples with the Penn State SBDC to coordinate business workshops for their clients.

Miss Barbara Fisher currently is serving as the district's acting deputy district director. She brings a wealth of experience to the position having previously served as the lead business development specialist, the women's business representative (WBOR) and the district office technical representative (DOTR) for the WBC. She was formerly the Small and Disadvantaged Business Specialist for the US Army Corps of Engineers, Pittsburgh district. Miss Fisher joined the Pittsburgh District Office in 1998.

MONROEVILLE RESIDENT IS FACE OF SUCCESS IN 2008 SBA RESOURCE MAGAZINE

In 1996 Charles Toran received a \$32,000 loan guaranteed by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to start his own business.

Fast forward 12 years and Toran, president of Sci-Tek Environmental Services Co., located in Penn Hills, will serve as the SBA's Pittsburgh District Office success story with his photo and accompanying story appearing in the district's "Resource" magazine.

People who contact the Pittsburgh office for information about starting their own business will receive a start-up kit with Charles featured in the regional magazine

Toran, who holds a bachelor's degree in engineering and a master's degree in business administration from the University of Pittsburgh, said he initially was content to climb the corporate ladder with local firms.

Then he watched the two large firms he was

employed by collapse.

"That's when I stopped looking for another job and decided to start my own company," he stated.

Combining his engineering and business backgrounds, Toran founded Sci-Tek Environmental Services Co., which provides quality environmental, civil and geotechnical consulting services to clients.

But, Toran said he found out that starting a business wasn't so rosy.

"When I started, I was the only employee but I ended up having two sets of business cards made," he said chuckling. "I did a lot of cold calling and realized that most company presidents don't make cold calls, so I became the regional sales manager and had another set of cards printed."

Toran estimates that he made about 100 calls per day slowly adding one or two clients at a time.

At the end of his fourth year in business, Toran



Charles Toran, Pittsburgh District Office Success Story

finally broke even.

His management skills coupled with Sci-Tek's steady growth has enabled him to now employ a staff of 27.

Toran said he is proud to serve as the SBA Pittsburgh District success story and be profiled in their magazine.

"The magazine is good for people who are starting their own business," he explained. "People sometimes think owning your own business is rosy, but, it's a struggle and you have to plan like we did."

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