

## News

### And the Winners Are...

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Dozens of business association meetings. Too many sleepless nights. Countless worries about money, employees, next steps, mistakes. Renovations. Street construction. The first customer. The first profitable day. Stocking shelves. Fifteen-hour days (day after day after day). Self-doubt. Self-confidence. Opening up early. Closing down late. Cashing out. Sweeping up...

...all to keep the dream alive.

This is the stuff of success for business owners around the globe, and success was in abundance at last night's 18th Annual Neighborhood Business Awards.

The awards, sponsored by the Neighborhood Business Alliance (NBA) and Neighborhood Ventures, celebrate the successes of neighborhood businesses—businesses that are the lifeblood of Grand Rapids, whose proprietors work to revitalize neighborhoods and create jobs, and whose successes spur vibrancy and prosperity across the city.

Some 400 business and civic leaders packed the Wealthy Theatre to celebrate the achievements of the 93 neighborhood businesses nominated for the awards. Excitement and anticipation charged the air as people mingled, sampled delicious foods, beer, and wine provided by local restaurants, and enjoyed the smooth grooves of Freddy DeGennaro.

"Small business is the underlying foundation of a city," says Ron Zoet, director of the Neighborhood Business Alliance. "Big business doesn't do it, big box stores don't do it. It's mom and pop living above the store, living next door to the store. They're the ones that keep the city rolling ahead and keep that glimmer in everybody's eye."

Each of the businesses nominated for the 12 categories of awards was visited by the Selection Committee, a group of volunteers who rated the businesses and selected the winners. Each nominee received a certificate of recognition, and each winner received an engraved crystal plaque.

Mayor George Heartwell emceed the evening and presented the awards, along with members of the City Commission.

"One of the 'most funnest' things a mayor gets to do is give out these awards," Mayor Heartwell tells the audience with a laugh.

The top honor of the evening, the Gerald R. Helmholtz Grand Award, recognizes the project exemplifying the best in renovation and revitalization in a neighborhood business district. The Selection Committee chooses the winner from all the nominees. This year the honors went to Parkland Properties for the multi-million dollar renovation of the former Union High School, now known as Union Square Condos. Jon Rooks, owner of Parkland Properties, accepted the award.

"I feel honored and I feel lucky," Rooks says. "Grand Rapids has never been better. It's better than it was last year, but it's not as good as it's going to be next year."

Backstage Rooks adds that the project wouldn't have happened without the support of the West Grand Neighborhood Organization.

"We were about to chicken out," Rooks says, "and then the neighborhood organization told us of their plans for a rain garden under the highway. We donated \$70,000 to make the rain garden a reality. It was a big, big part of our marketing to be able to make the highway side of the project work, so it was great for the neighborhood and for us."



Former Mayor John Logie presented the John H. Logie Business Champion award, which honors an individual who is an exemplary advocate of the neighborhood business districts. That award went to Bob Sullivan, the founder of Sullivan's Furniture and a 30-year member of the zoning board of appeals.

Sullivan's business history includes nearly a dozen successful Grand Rapids businesses, including a Texaco gas station at Michigan and Diamond that he bought when he was 17.

"I've always been a neighborhood businessman," Sullivan says backstage after receiving the award. "I always root for the small guy and I root for the small businesses."

This year, for the first time, a second award was added to ten of the categories: the Rapid Growth People's Choice Award. Online voters had two weeks to cast their ballots via the Rapid Growth web site.

"I think the People's Choice award is really a neat thing," says Kimberly Van Dyk of Neighborhood Ventures. "It's been really exciting and energizing to have the public select their own winners."

Pink Blvd, a women's fashions store that just opened in September, was the People's Choice Best New Business winner.

"We're shocked. We really did not think we'd get this," says Kirsten McLin, who co-owns the boutique with Debbie Otten. "We love our store, we love the neighborhood, and right now, we love everybody."

Online voters also cast their ballots for the Gerald R. Ford Middle School in the Best New Construction category and Harrison Park School for Best Interior Renovation.

"I'm thrilled to accept this award on behalf of the school district," says David Smith, GRPS spokesperson. "It reassures us that we're on the right track and we're contributing to the neighborhoods."

"The Neighborhood Business Awards really shines a light on the importance of the neighborhood business districts and the neighborhood businesses that are in them," says Kimberly Van Dyk.

"We don't think of the impact that the collective whole has on our economy--the jobs created and the fabulous environments that make people want to come and stay and live. That is the kind of thing we want to highlight to let people know this is important and these neighborhood businesses need your support."

#### Winners of the 2007 Neighborhood Business Awards

##### Best Exterior Maintenance

1st Place Winner: Logan's Alley, Midtown

People's Choice: Logan's Alley Best Exterior Renovation

1st Place Winner: O'Brien & O'Brien, DDS, Creston

People's Choice: O'Brien & O'Brien, DDS Best Interior Renovation

1st Place Winner: Literary Life Bookstore & More, Madison Square

People's Choice: Harrison Park School, West Leonard Best Longstanding Business

1st Place Winner: Jurgens and Holtvluwer, West Leonard

People's Choice: Real Food Café, Alger Heights Best New Business

1st Place Winner: Bobby J's Restaurant, Heartside

People's Choice: Pink Blvd, East Hills Best New Construction

1st Place (Tie): Lighthouse Communities for Uptown Village, Uptown, and Cherry Street Investors for 924 Cherry Project, East Hills

People's Choice: Gerald R. Ford Middle School, Madison Square Best Reuse of a Building

1st Place Winner: Elevation Group for Hopson Flats, Heartside

People's Choice: Higher Ground Rock Climbing Center, Monroe North Best Promotional Event

1st Place Winner: Creston Business Association for the Creston Car Show, Creston

People's Choice: Local First for the Eat Local Challenge, Grand Rapids Best Use of a Sign or Awning

1st Place Winner: City Life Church, Division South

People's Choice: Martha's Vineyard, MidtownBest Window Display

1st Place Winner: 954 East Resale With Attitude, Uptown

People's Choice: Easttown Antiques, EasttownJohn H. Logie Award

Winner: Bob SullivanThe Gerald R. Helmholdt Grand Award

Winner: Parkland Properties for Union Square Condos

Photos:

Jon Rooks of Parkland Properties accepts his award from Mayor Heartwell

Bob Sullivan accepts the John H. Logie Business Champion Award from former Mayor John Logie

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