



CENTER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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18th Annual Joel Labovitz Entrepreneurial Success Awards Recipients Announced

Duluth, MN – The UMD Center for Economic Development (CED) announced the recipients of the 18th Annual Joel Labovitz Entrepreneurial Success Awards during a luncheon on April 21, 2010. More than 300 business and community leaders attended the event at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center.

Since 1993, the Joel Labovitz Entrepreneurial Success Awards have recognized small business owners who have dared to dream, taken a risk, and invested in the region. This year's award recipients were selected from an impressive roster of 29 nominees from throughout the Twin Ports and Arrowhead Region.

The 2010 recipients are:

- *Micro-Entrepreneur*: Up North Stone, Inc.- Michelle Gunderson and Angel Snidarich, Virginia
- *Emerging Entrepreneur*: Dynamic Structural Steel - Jason Erickson, Proctor
- *Established Entrepreneur*: Dockside Fish Market of Grand Marais - Shele and Harley Toftey, Grand Marais
- *Mature Entrepreneur*: Disability Specialists, Inc. - Tom Ehrbright, Cook
- *Innovation*: S-O-S, Inc. On Line Leak Sealing - Jim Carter, Duluth

Other Recognition awards presented were:

- *Entrepreneurial Leadership*: Sandford C. Hoff
- *Entrepreneurial Achievement*: Jack H. LaVoy

Recipient Bios

MICRO-ENTREPRENEUR AWARD

Up North Stone, Inc. Michelle Gunderson and Angel Snidarich, Virginia

Founded: November 2008

Employees: One full-time and one part-time employee

Michelle Gunderson and Angel Snidarich make a great team. Together they launched a business selling beautiful Minnesota natural stone utilized from mine overburden rock supplies for use in architecture, landscaping, and masonry—and they managed to make a profit in their first year of operation. Through hand picking/sorting, splitting, or cutting the raw material, the company adds value to the mine waste overburden stone. Customers get dimensional stones that maintain their natural appeal at a significantly lower cost. A highlight of its first year was the completion of 21,500 square feet of slate flagstone for the new border patrol crossing at Warroad, Minn.

EMERGING ENTREPRENEUR AWARD

Dynamic Structural Steel - Jason Erickson, Proctor

Founded: May 2006

Employees: 50+ full-time employees

Mixing state-of-the-art technology and old-fashioned Midwestern ambition produces results. Just ask Jason Erickson, president of Dynamic Structural Steel, the leading fabricator of structural steel in the area. DSS brings national work to our region, providing for 50 full-time employees in the local economy. Erickson says the key to success is prioritizing customer service and doing whatever it takes to get the job done. Basically, he does anything and everything.

ESTABLISHED ENTREPRENEUR AWARD

Dockside Fish Market of Grand Marais - Shele and Harley Toftey, Grand Marais

Founded: June 1998

Employees: Five full-time, 10 part-time and 35+ seasonal employees

Twelve-year-old Dockside Fish Market, owned and operated by husband and wife duo Shele and Harley Toftey, sells fresh and smoked local fish, as well as seafood and deli items. They also run a commercial fishing operation, catching herring and lake trout and smoking their own fish. If your mouth isn't watering yet, they also have cheese varieties, homemade spreads, sauces, and unique gift items. In the fall, Shele and Harley employ up to 50 people, who process herring roe into caviar. Because they're a seasonal business, they spend eight months of the year working without weekend breaks. But when you're as zealous about your job as Shele and Harley, it's worth it.

MATURE ENTREPRENEUR AWARD

Disability Specialists, Inc. - Tom Ehrbright, Cook

Founded: June 1990

Employees: 34 full-time and two part-time employees

With some 2,600 clients, Disability Specialist, Inc., represents people with Social Security Disability claims throughout Minnesota, western Wisconsin, and eastern North and South Dakota. When the company started, Social Security judges came to Hibbing to hear claims four to five times a year for two to three days. Now, they come 10 to 14 times a year for five days. Tom Ehrbright believes the company has truly brought justice to the Northland and the Brainerd area when it comes to Social Security Disability. The company is in the final stages of planning a new 11,519-square-foot office that will house 20 additional employees. Employing the latest technology has allowed Disability Specialist to have a central office in Cook, with single offices throughout the state, making it possible to represent more than 15,000 people successfully in its service area—one person at a time.

INNOVATION AWARD

S-O-S, Inc. On Line Leak Sealing - Jim Carter, Duluth

Founded: July 1988

Employees: Nine employees

Jim Carter has never met a leak he couldn't seal. A leak-sealing service, S-O-S seals high pressure steam, gas, acid, and basically any pressure piping that springs a leak, and does it under maximum pressure and flow. Using a method Jim developed, S-O-S is able to make repairs with a 100 percent success rate and zero accidents or injuries, all while factories, plants, mills, or hospitals stay on-line—avoiding shutdowns and saving time and money. Jim compares it to fixing a flat tire on your car while you

continue driving at 70 mph. The growing company has sealed thousands of leaks throughout the Midwest for some of the largest and smallest corporations and developed one-of-a-kind maintenance solutions for the industrial world.

Entrepreneurial Achievement: Jack H. LaVoy

Jack LaVoy is a man who gets excited about what can happen, has the ability to get others excited about those ideas, and to work behind the scenes to bring about collaboration and cooperation so that a project can be brought to fruition. He was only 24 years old when he was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives and served two terms, at that point the youngest person elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives. The relationships and friendships Jack developed during those years are still part of his life today and have played a part in creating the regional economy we all enjoy. Because of family commitments he chose not to run again and began a long career that has continued to benefit our region. In 1976, at Mayor Beaudin's request, he designed a flag for the City of Duluth which the city still uses today. Some of the projects that Jack has played a role in that have produced employment opportunities and brought an economic impact to our area are: the Foreign Trade Zone #51 at the Port; UMD's NRRI, Engineering School and Medical School; the Downtown Renaissance Program and Storefront Loan Program; Lake Superior Paper (now known as New Page); Superior Recycled Fiber; Air Base transition to a federal prison; The Fond Du Luth Casino; the commercialization of local rough fish as a substitute for crabmeat; the transfer of jets from the K.I. Sawyer base in Michigan to the #148 Fighter Wing in Duluth; call centers to the Iron Range; DO I.T. Program; and more. Jack has received recognition for his efforts over the years including UMD Labovitz School of Business and Economic Business Leader of the Year in 1986, The Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations in 2004, The Certificate of Achievement from the American Society of Association Executives in 1991, and eleven "Addy" Awards between 1986 – 1995 to name just a few. Jack has even authored a chapter for the book, *The Will and the Way* in 2004. His community and professional achievements go beyond what has been listed, including contributions made while working for Area Partnership for Economic Expansion (APEX) and he is currently using the enthusiasm and excitement that he is known for to bring about dramatic changes at the Great Lakes Aquarium.

Entrepreneurial Leadership: Sandford C. Hoff

Sandy Hoff brings leadership to anything he is involved in, particularly public and private developments. He is a person who brings energy and excitement as he walks into a room and when he sees an opportunity that is beneficial for the community. He has a "can do" attitude that readily transfers to everyone involved. It is impossible to be skeptical or a naysayer when he is working on a project. Sandy's accomplishments include serving as president of a 120 year-old firm specializing in commercial real estate, as well as President/owner of several ventures that create wealth in our region: Computer Renaissance Duluth, Lake Superior Helicopters, Timber Trails Residential Land Development Hermantown, Pier B Holding LLC and Bizprop LLC. He also plays an active role in the community having served as a board chair or president of the Rotary Club of Duluth #25, Depot Foundation, Northshore Inline Marathon, Scott Anderson Youth Leadership Advisory Board, Building Owners and Managers Association, Greater Downtown special service district advisory board as well as serving on the boards of the Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce, Lester Park Hockey Association and the Appraisal Institute Lake Superior chapter. Sandy's current board service includes St. Michael's School, the Duluth Playhouse, Woodland Hills, Visit Duluth and Lake Superior College Foundation.

The UMD Center for Economic Development is a joint program of the UMD Labovitz School of Business and Economics, the Natural Resources Research Institute, and the Swenson College of Science and Engineering. UMD Center for Economic Development provides technical assistance to individuals who have an interest in starting or expanding a business in Northeastern Minnesota.

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