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Rotary honors Newman 10

By REGINA DENNIS
Eagle Staff Writer

The area's top-performing businesses were honored Wednesday during the Bryan Rotary Club's 14th Annual Newman 10 Business Performance Awards.

The dedication to hard work that's come to characterize the awards kept at least one winning entrepreneur away on business.

Sponsored by Newman Printing Co., the awards recognize the 10 local businesses that have experienced the most sales growth over a three-year period. About 200 people attended Wednesday's reception at the College Station Hilton Hotel & Conference Center.

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Winners named Wednesday during the 14th Annual Newman 10 Business Performance Awards ceremony were (front row from left) Uri Geva, David Ochoa (sitting in for Rising Star award winner Michael Jacox), David and Julia Gardner, Carolyn and Buckey Turk, and Jim Brooks; (back row from left) Kier Jackson, Malcolm Hein, James Benham, Jonathan Gardner, Jan and Dave Stott, Calvin and Robin Jackson, Kristen and Wayne Arrington, Tommy Cole, Judi Henneke and Kevin Reim.

New to the awards program was the presentation of the first Commercialization Rising Star Award, honoring an entrepreneur for innovation and economic development.

The inaugural winner, Michael Jacox, president and co-founder of StarVision Technologies Inc., was on a business trip. Jacox, who has worked at a NASA-funded research center at Texas A&M University developing space and aeronautic technology, said in a phone interview that he had wanted to start the business for a while, but it was simply a matter of waiting for the right opportunity.

"There was an Air Force customer who wanted to continue to fund some of the research we had been conducting," he said. "He wanted to see a small business get started, and he had some seed funding ... and it just seemed to be the right time to get [the company] up and running."

StarVision Technologies, which was founded in 2003, builds "intelligent vision systems," such as "Star," which helps a satellite identify its position by detecting the position of stars, and "Vision," a camera system that enables an unmanned vehicle to successfully dock with another vehicle.

Most of the company's products are used by the Air Force and NASA, Jacox said, but StarVision is working on several products that should be on the market in early 2008 for "backyard astronomers and outdoor sportsmen."

To be eligible for the Newman 10, businesses must be privately owned, have been operating in Brazos County for at least five years and have an annual revenue between \$50,000 and \$25 million. Each business had to submit an application and financial documentation of its growth between 2005 and 2006. The Mays Business School at Texas A&M University calculated the sales growth of each business and ranked the top 10.

Infinity Pro Sports, which has received a Newman 10 award for four consecutive years, secured the No. 1 spot with 198 percent sales growth between 2004 and 2006.

The nine-year-old company, a division of UK Advertising Inc., designs Web sites, with an

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emphasis on sports teams. Infinity Pro Sports co-founder Uri Geva said he was surprised at winning the top honor.

"I didn't even know what our numbers were; our accountant just turned everything in," he said. "I expected us to be on the list again, but I had no idea we'd be number one. I thought we would be fourth."

One of Infinity Pro Sports' most recent ventures is the establishment of the Brazos Valley Bombers baseball team. Geva said he attended all three of last week's opening games and helped with a variety of duties, including selling tickets and assisting parking attendants.

"Our slogan for the team is 'Summer Just got Fun,'" he said. "We're not like, 'We own the Bombers, look at us.' It's 'We own the Bombers and we want to make sure everyone has a good time.'"

Geva said Infinity Pro Sports' success can be attributed to its emphasis on pleasing customers.

"Customer service is key here in our office," he said. "We work with the big guys, but the little guys can expect the same respect, the same customer service, and the same tools."

Other Newman Award recipients also emphasized the importance of customer service. Judi Henneke, owner of The Pharmacy Shop Inc., said the company works to exceed customer expectations.

"We are always stepping outside the bounds of normal customer service," she said.

Many of the honorees are no strangers to the Newman 10 list, including environmental survey and analysis company TDI-Brooks International Inc. and Aggieland A/C & Heating, which each made a third appearance on the list, and Redtail Equipment Rental LLC, which received its fourth Newman 10 award.

Buckey and Carolyn Turk, owners of MacResource Computer and Service, collected a record fifth Newman 10 award. The husband and wife, who have been in business since 1993, said their 12 employees have contributed to the success of the business.

"It's [about] paying attention to the industry and keeping up with the latest and greatest advances," Carolyn Turk said. "There's no way one or two people can keep up with it all."

Wayne Arrington, a co-owner of Brazos Valley Office Solutions, said the company is proud of its first Newman 10 award.

"It feels great," he said. "We're looking forward to, hopefully, a lot of business that will come as a result of this award."

The six-year-old company, which was eligible to compete for the Newman 10 for the first time this year, sells office products, including copiers, printers and fax machines, mostly to small businesses, Arrington said. The company is a member of the Brazos Independent Business Alliance, which promotes building ties between area businesses to foster greater economic growth in the community, he said.

"We encourage local businesses to stay within the community, relying on local distributors and businesses for all their operational activities," he said. "By doing that, we can circulate up to three times more [money] to the city."

The Bryan Rotary Club also presented the Anco Insurance Lifetime Business Achievement Award to David and Julia Gardner, owners of David Gardner's Jewelers. The award recognizes a business for its contributions to the community and longevity.

The couple, who have owned the business for 25 years, said they were surprised at what they call a prematurely awarded honor.

"We are incredibly surprised," David Gardner said. "When I first saw [members of the Bryan Rotary Club] coming to congratulate us, I thought they were just coming to ask for a donation."



AT A GLANCE

2007 Newman 10 Award winners

- 1. Infinity Pro Sports**
- 2. MacResource Computers and Service**
- 3. TDI-Brooks International**
- 4. BCA Electric**
- 5. JB Knowledge Technologies**
- 6. Sign Pro**
- 7. Brazos Valley Office Solutions**
- 8. Aggieland A/C & Heating**
- 9. The Pharmacy Shop**
- 10. Redtail Equipment Rental**

"We were just working with our business and trying to keep things running smoothly, and to be recognized for everything you are doing is such a bonus," Julia Gardner said.

- Regina Dennis' e-mail address is regina.dennis@theeagle.com.