



Wisconsin Family Business of the Year Award

WINNERS

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SKYWARD, INC.

Stevens Point

Grand Award Winner

Large Company Category

Founded in the family garage in Stevens Point in 1980, this company has grown to be one of the premier providers of school administrative software in the country. In 1981 Skyward, Inc. developed a software application for Merrill Public Schools. Three more districts were added as clients that year. By 1985 they were up to 50 school districts. Branch offices were opened in Illinois and Minnesota.

Today, Skyward applications are installed in 1,236 K through 12 school districts in 16 states, and also in India, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and Lebanon. The company employs 294 people located in ten branch offices. And talk about growth, between 2006 and 2007, sales increased 47%!

Started by Jim and Jean King, the company has experienced growth from the beginning. And they integrated the family into the business early on. All three of their children worked part time in the business as soon as they were able to contribute. Some as early as eight. All three children graduated from state universities and, upon graduation, the children were offered full-time entry level positions. They accepted. Each child was given a 10% share in the company and they all serve on the board of directors. A clear succession plan is in place and is being implemented.

Skyward is a big supporter of their communities through charitable giving, but also with their goal to Buy Wisconsin. 35% of their workforce around the country are graduates of either UW Stevens Point, or Mid-State Technical College.

K-TECH KLEENING SYSTEMS, INC.

Weston

Grand Award Winner

Medium company category

This Weston Wisconsin company has taken "Being Green" to a new level. Not only are they taking care of their family, but they are being true stewards of their community and the environment. The Grand Award in the Medium company category goes to K – tech Cleaning Systems of Weston Wisconsin.

K-tech started in 1975 by Clarence and Sue Kersemeier as a carpet and commercial cleaning company. It is now run by the second generation with son, Craig as President and daughter, Lauri as administrative Manager. And the third generation is learning the business as well. Of their 99 employees, nine are family members.

Along with the traditional cleaning business, K-tech has been innovative and aggressive in adding additional services. They offer recycling, document destruction, restoration, reconstruction, remediation and abatement, equipment sales and distribution, flooring and interior design. The company operates seven divisions from five locations.

K-tech is committed to the protection of the environment and of the health of customers and employees. In 2006 they implemented a program called "Be Green" designed to help customers reduce the use of harmful products, save energy and create a more sustainable environment. This program goes way beyond the mission of the company, even giving away compact fluorescent light bulbs along with energy saving tips to anyone who asks. They use eco friendly cleaning products, equipment that requires less water, and new trucks that operate on soy-based diesel fuel.

What impressed the judges was their efforts in the community. K-tech started the Weston Food Pantry that provides low-income families with food baskets. The program is run by K-tech employees and is funded with a golf outing, the proceeds of which the company matches.

DRAKE & COMPANY OF MADISON, INC.

Madison

Grand Award Winner

Small company category

Like many start-up companies, this one started very small. Their first desk was a cardboard box and their first chair, was the floor. But persistence, innovation, and compassion made their business successful.

Founded in 1978, Drake & Company of Madison is a staffing solutions business that has touched many Madison businesses and employees. Started by Leanne Starr and her husband, Gary, their first business equipment was a telephone and phone book. Leanne had been in the staffing business for years prior, and knew that she had the talent to do it on her own. Leanne sat on the floor of her office making 50 calls a day to potential clients.

Leanne and Gary's two daughters, Kim and Kelly, became involved in the business after they graduated from high school, and today are running the business.

The foundation of Drake & Company mirrors the values of the Starr family. Ethical business practices drive the company, even if revenue is at stake. You can expect to work hard. You can expect to be treated with respect. And you can expect to put your family first.

Drake & Company supports the local business community. Kelly Starr is a Madison Chamber of Commerce Ambassador. And she has been very active in an organization called Dane Buy Local, a group that supports local businesses, with the goal of local economic growth and reducing the environmental cost of shipping products from a distance.

Kim and her husband have a daughter with autism and she spends considerable time speaking to groups and school officials about autism and how to integrate children with autism into mainstream activities.

The family intends to keep it a family business. Leanne thoroughly enjoys her time in the office, but has no plans to retire. She co-owns the business with her daughters. As for the next generation, they're still in school but that future looks bright.

J.J. KELLER & ASSOCIATES, INC.

Neenah

Special Award Winner

"Jack Keller Award"

This company lives by the guiding principle "Shared responsibility – shared results". Every associate is responsible for the success of the company. JJ Keller & Associates of Neenah started in 1953 as a one man shop that has grown to a 1300 associate organization. The company provides risk management and safety products, consulting and training for the transportation industry.

The business was started by Jack and Ethel Keller. Their sons were offered the opportunity to work in the business, but were never forced to do so. And two of them did. Bob and Jim took up the offer, joined their parents, and are currently running the business. When Bob and Jim had children of their own, the same principle applied. Three of Jack and Ethel's grandchildren have accepted positions within the company and three have chosen different paths.

This business is an obvious business success. But what caught the judges attention was their community impact. Ethel Keller had a favorite saying: "Brighten the corner of the world where you live". In honor of Ethel's 70th birthday in 1991, Jack Keller set up the Keller Foundation as a way to formalize the process of giving back to the Fox Valley region.

When Jack passed away in June of 2007, he left his 78 million dollar estate to the foundation, ensuring that the philanthropic work would live on for years to come.

GORDY'S LAKEFRONT MARINE, INC.

Fontana

Special Award Winner

"Southern Wisconsin Fixture"

This family business is all about creating great experiences. They are a landmark, a fixture, a legend. On the shores of Lake Geneva, Gordy's Lakefront Marine has been satisfying customers since 1955.

Fueled by the love of outdoor activities and the local community, Gordy Whowell began a seasonal boat ride and rental business in Fontana. In the years following, Gordy purchased adjoining businesses and property to expand the business.

Gordy's operations consists of a marina, the Boat House Restaurant, Pro Shop, Bait Shop, Lawn Care, Tours, Farms, and boat show rooms.

Although Gordy had a significant role in the operations until his death in 1988, his son Tom had taken over as of 1969. Tom and his wife, Geri raised their four children in the seasonal hustle and bustle of a resort town. Each of them had a hand in the development of the company from an early stage. This third generation each left briefly for college, and returned to run accounting, sales, marketing and operations. It is this third generation that is currently running the business.

Each of the third generation has worked in every operation of the business to gain an understanding of the enterprise. The family exhibits one of the benchmark attributes of successful family businesses; they hold weekly family meetings to discuss all aspects of the operation.

Gordy's has donated over 30 acres of land to the Geneva Lake Conservancy and goes to great lengths to beautify the land and buildings they own.

O'LEARY PLUMBING & HEATING, INC.

East Troy

Special Award Winner

"Half Century Success"

This family business got its start in 1958, by a husband and wife from East Troy. Ray and Ruth O'Leary started O'Leary Plumbing. Ray primarily did well pump repairs on farms, while Ruth handled customer calls and billing. During the early years when times were tough, the father of three also worked nights at area manufacturing plants to keep the business growing. And grow it did.

Out of pump repair grew residential plumbing. The 70's saw expansion into hydronic heating systems and septic systems. They have expanded their business to include drinking water systems, high velocity air cooling and geothermal heating systems.

As sons of start-up business owners, Dan and Tim O'Leary worked part-time with their dad to learn the trade in their youth. Ray felt it would be a beneficial for Dan to acquire his apprenticeship training with another plumbing company in the area following high school. Dan joined the firm full time in 1975 not only as a licensed journeyman plumber, bringing plumbing and business skills from another perspective, which is a best practice among family businesses. Younger brother, Tim joined the firm in 1977 as an apprentice plumber right after high school.

The brothers bought the business from their parents in 1991. The business appears to be in the blood as the third generation is already on the job. Dan's son, Kevin brought engineering and computer aided design skills to the company. He is a master plumber. Tim's daughter, Becky is one of only eight females in Wisconsin in a plumbing apprentice program. The business now employs 27 people including nine family members.

As with many family businesses, The O'Learys are also a good neighbor. They donate labor and material for non-profit projects. In honor of Ray and Ruth O'Leary, the family will be awarding two scholarships to East Troy High School graduates. One for a student going into business studies, and one to a student studying in a construction trade.

Celebrating 50 years in business in 2008, the judges awarded O'Leary Plumbing & Heating with the "Half Century Success" Award.