



2012 SMALL BUSINESS AWARD WINNERS

Los Angeles District Office

Small Business Persons of the Year

Ada Chan and Amanda Ma

Fresh Events Company, Inc. – Pasadena, CA.

www.fresheventscompany.com



Fresh Events Company creates winning events with a constant eye towards quality, creativity and producing measurable results. Ada Chan and Amanda Ma, principals and co-owners, founded the company in 2006. For the past six years, Chan and Ma have grown the company into a million-dollar business with 200 percent projected growth in 2012. Fresh Events Company employs five full-time employees and over 60 contractors annually. The company has been instrumental in developing its contractor and subcontractor base, which are likewise small business owners. Training is also important to Chan and Ma, who have integrated a successful internship training program for students looking for career development and opportunities in event planning. Also, the Fresh Events Company team have donated over 1,200 service hours, \$20,000 of in-kind products and \$20,000 in monetary donations to community organizations as part of the co-owners' commitment to giving back.

Innovation Through Technology Business of the Year

PlanetBids, Inc. – Woodland Hills, CA.

Arpie and Alan Zavian

www.planetbids.com



PlanetBids' goal is to bring together the public purchasing and contracting staff as well as the vendor community. The company and its owners accomplish this efficiently and cost effectively by providing a leading web-based, bid-management solution called BidsOnline™. Since its inception in 1998, the company has focused on the education, government and private sectors. Arpie Zavian, a co-owner and the primary developer on their online tool set, saw a need to create a solution to government agency procurement officials, public



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works directors, and the vendor and contractor communities. In 2004, PlanetBids signed an agreement with the California State University System and 23 campuses and has grown steadily with 30 to 60 percent growth since. Currently, the company has eight full-time and two part-time employees and serves over 60 clients and boasts over a 95 percent retention rate. The solutions provided by PlanetBids save thousands of dollars for all its users – creating job opportunities for its small business entities and savings for its government agencies.

Environmental “Green” Conservator of the Year

Fredrick H. Johring

GSL Transportation Services, Inc. – Long Beach, CA.

www.gsltrans.com



Since 2003, Golden State Express, Inc. has transported containers to and from the Southern California Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. Although Fredrick H. Johring, owner of GSE, had built his company using the services of independent owner-operated drivers, a state-mandated initiative for Clean Truck Programs in the Long Beach and Los Angeles Ports changed the way GSE and Johring did business. From 2009 to 2011, GSE purchased 25 new LNG (Liquid Natural Gas) trucks resulting in a 50 percent reduction in fuel expenses and cleaner air in and around the port. In addition, GSE leased these new trucks back to the owner-operators and also hired 36 new employee truck drivers so GSE could control the truck operations more efficiently, running two shifts per day. Recently, GSE was among seven local maritime and cargo companies selected for the Clean Air Action Plan Air Quality Award by the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach for taking extraordinary measures to cut air emissions, modernize facilities and implement innovative operations to reduce air pollution.

Small Business Exporter of the Year

Saskia Chiesa

International Checkout, Inc. – Van Nuys, CA.

www.internationalcheckout.com



Launched in 2003, International Checkout, Inc. started in Saskia Chiesa’s Los Angeles apartment with less than \$1,500. In 2012, Chiesa’s company, which allows U.S. retailers from mom-and-pops to the big-box stores to sell to a global audience without the associated risk and difficulty, is growing rapidly with a four-year growth of 441 percent. A native of the Netherlands who moved to the United States in 1998, Chiesa



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was constantly getting requests from her friends asking her to ship them designer shoes and clothes from American retailers that they were unable to purchase directly from the stores. Chiesa's idea was that her company would be the bridge that allows consumers worldwide to order American goods from U.S. retailers and have them delivered right to their doorstep. Today, her company enables more than 900 U.S. retailers of which 90 percent are small businesses themselves but also larger corporations such as Jockey.com, bebe.com, and DrMartens.com to connect with international consumers in more than 220 countries. By implementing the International Checkout solution, U.S. merchants generate an increase in revenues averaging 6 to 12 percent.

Family-Owned Business of the Year

Wedgewood Wedding & Banquet Centers – Camarillo, CA.

John W. Zaruka and Family

www.wedgewoodbanquet.com



Wedgewood Wedding and Banquet Center chain, created, owned and operated by the Zaruka Family began in 1986 in Ventura, California when John and Linda Zaruka took out two SBA-backed loans from National Bank of California to buy a failing golf course restaurant. There were no customers or employees at the time. They immediately converted the space to banquet service only and the business took root. Both the Zaruka children, Bill and Stacy, worked alongside their parents at an early age and then went on to get degrees at excellent hospitality colleges, eventually returning to the family business as partial owners. Since 2002, the Zaruka's have added 15 new "Wedgewood's". In 2011, the Wedgewood's will serve over 375,000 banquet guests and host over 1,500 weddings. Starting with one employee, the family-owned business now employs 100 full-time and 300 part-time employees - in the last three years alone, two hundred employees have been added (a 100 percent increase). Revenues from 2011 will exceed \$20 million and just as important they have maintained an "A" guest rating. The Zaruka's are also well known for their community service and recently raised \$25,000 for Foodshare (the Ventura County Foodbank) in addition to other fundraisers that have generated millions of dollars for the local and international community.

Home-Based Business Champion of the Year

Sandra Dennis

Sandra Dennis Family Child Care – Lakewood, CA.

www.beststepsfamilychildcare.com





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Sandra Dennis Family Child Care opened for business in 1994. Sandra Dennis, owner, said that first year was the toughest but by 1995, her enrollment had swelled from one to eight with her capacity then at 12. Six years later, Dennis purchased a property and began her prosperous path as a home owner, small business owner and more importantly as a small business champion for home-based businesses. Once Dennis had started her business she sought out local resources such as the Long Beach-Lakewood Family Child Care Association. Eventually, Dennis was elected as the first African American President of the association and under her leadership membership surged. Dennis also became one of the strongest voices for the State Family Child Care Association in Southern California and was nominated and served on the County Child Care Planning Commission and the Los Angeles County Legislative Advisory Committee for five years. She was instrumental as a member of the work groups that helped to develop policies and guidelines for the launch of the Los Angeles Universal Preschool Program. In addition to her advocacy work, she also continually worked on her training as a family child-care professional – not only was Dennis one of the first child-care centers to become nationally accredited but was instrumental in encouraging 30 other providers from her area to participate. Sandra Dennis Family Child Care has twice been Nationally Accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care – first in 2004 and again in 2010. Throughout her 18 years of service to the Long Beach-Lakewood communities, Dennis has nurtured and cared for children with the highest standards and mentored, encouraged and promoted best practices to other providers in her profession.

Financial Service Champion of the Year

Sue Baaden

JP Morgan Chase Bank, N.A.- Greater Los Angeles Area

www.chase.com



Sue Baaden is a senior vice president and regional manager for Chase Business Banking in California. Baaden has over 30 years with Chase and has held various leadership positions in the retail, commercial and business banking divisions. Overseeing the Chase expansion into the California market over the last three years, Baaden has built a team of 130 relationship managers throughout Northern and Southern California. As the SVP and regional manager for Chase Business Banking, she is responsible for providing deposit and cash management services, payment solutions and a broad array of lending products to businesses with up to \$20 million in annual revenue. JP Morgan Chase Bank, N.A. was Los Angeles SBA District Office's number one SBA lender for fiscal year 2011 and is currently the number one SBA lender for the second quarter of fiscal year 2012.



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Women in Business Champion of the Year

Patricia A. Kotze-Ramos

Diversified Risk Management, Inc. – Downey, CA.

www.diversifiedriskmanagement.com



In a male-dominated field of mostly retired law enforcement professionals, Patricia A. Kotze-Ramos, owner and founder of Diversified Risk Management, Inc., has a loyal and growing following and is a champion for bringing more women into the private investigation field. Since 2002, when she co-founded the firm, Kotze-Ramos has handled thousands of matters involving employment, civil and criminal matters. In 2005, DRM Inc. grew from 500 sq. ft. to 2,500 sq. ft. and she now employs approximately fifty employees and contractors. Her company serves small business as well as Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, attorneys, non-profits and individuals who require the best in investigations, training, background checks and security services. Having been in the consulting business for over 27 years, Kotze-Ramos has served a role-model for other women and actively mentors other women-business owners through several boards committees and organizations. In addition to running a successful business, she has served as a member and president of the Soroptimist International of Downey, as a board member on the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Chair of City of Downey Public Works Committee and currently is the 2011 City of Downey Chamber of Commerce President-elect.

Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year

Bill Pike

My Writing Resources – Los Angeles, CA.

<http://mywritingresources.com>



Bill Pike has a knack for communicating with people and especially veterans. As a Vietnam veteran, he personally relates to the stresses and trauma of war that often follow the servicemembers back from Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, Pike is the founder and owner of My Writing Resources, which he created to help individuals promote themselves through effective writing. Eventually, Pike found his calling by using his vast experience as a technical writer and marketing communications manager for Honda and Acura to help veterans get back into the workforce. Currently, Pike teaches three separate job clubs for veterans that cover resume preparation, job hunting and interview skills. In addition, he volunteers at the West Los Angeles VA Transition Center where recently returned veterans enroll for benefits and healthcare. Also on behalf of the Transition Center, Pike conducts a *Compass Setting* course that provides goal setting efforts and encourages



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entrepreneurship as a source of employment to veterans. Pike has hosted the SBA many times and the local Small Business Development Center at his *Compass Setting* course. His website speak directly to veterans on the process of job hunting and small business opportunities and his blog shares stories about VA employees as well as veterans. Bill also is involved with the non-profit L.A. Community Services where he distributes clothing, technology, books and Pepsi products to VA residents and patients.

Small Business Development Center Service Excellence & Innovation Award



Small Business Development Center hosted by Long Beach City College

<http://longbeachsbdc.org/>



The Small Business Development Center (SBDC), at Long Beach City College, is comprised of a team of experienced current business owners who provide one-on-one advising services to fellow business owners at no cost. The goal of the SBDC is to partner with clients and teach them the technical skills necessary to succeed in their business. The SBDC at LBCC served 1,133 clients in 2011 and assisted with 69 business start-ups, which created and retained 498 and 260 jobs, respectively. The SBDC at LBCC assists business owners in building websites (at no cost) and teaches them how to maintain and update the site on their own. The SBDC at LBCC also helps clients by packaging loans and then shopping that loan for the client (again, at no cost). In 2011, the SBDC helped to infuse over \$9 million in capital to their clients’ businesses. The SBDC at LBCC also hosts regular workshops at a low cost on various topics such as business planning, finance, legal, marketing, international trade, operations, social media, website build/design, and government procurement/certification. In 2011, the SBDC at LBCC hosted 88 training events and provided 4,476 advising hours for its clients.

Women’s Business Center of Excellence Award

Women’s Economic Ventures – Santa Barbara, CA.

www.wevonline.org



In 1991, WEV began as a peer-lending program based on the Grameen model providing loans of up to \$1,500 to low-income women. Now, twenty years later, WEV offers comprehensive business training, consulting, coaching and access to loans of up to \$50,000 to pre-bankable businesses. WEV serves approximately 1,000 unduplicated clients each year – primarily low-and moderate-income women in Santa Barbara, Ventura and Kern counties. WEV has a staff 11 and a total annual operating budget of \$1.1 million. Funding comes from grants, government contracts, fees, corporate and individual contributions. WEV has received funding from the SBA’s Office of Women’s Business Ownership since 2003 to support its core Self-Employment Training programs in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.