



# News Release

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## ***SBA Honors Outstanding Disaster Recovery Efforts***

**WASHINGTON** – A franchisee whose three restaurants were destroyed after Hurricane Katrina, an upstate New York business owner who had to shut down for four months after a flood, a small-town mayor from Alabama whose leadership guided his town through the tragic aftermath of a killer tornado, and a Florida volunteer who single-handedly supported relief and recovery efforts for disaster survivors were each presented today with the Phoenix Award during the U.S. Small Business Administration's National Small Business Week 2008.

The awards were presented this morning during a breakfast held at the Mandarin Oriental hotel in Washington, D.C. The breakfast was sponsored by Lockheed Martin Corporation.

"These individuals displayed tremendous courage and resourcefulness in the midst of several devastating disasters," said SBA Administrator Steve Preston. "The Phoenix Award acknowledges their heroic efforts, and is a token of appreciation for their contributions to the physical and economic recovery of their communities."

**Henry L. Coaxum Jr., owner of Coaxum Enterprises, Inc., New Orleans, La.,** received the Phoenix Award for ***Small Business Disaster Recovery***. The owner of three McDonald's franchises, Coaxum lost all three restaurants, an office complex and his home during Hurricane Katrina. He moved quickly to find innovative ways to recover and rebuild, while getting his 275 employees back to work as soon as possible. Coaxum was approved for three SBA disaster assistance loans for \$999,000 to cover the rebuilding costs of his restaurants, home and office building. Six months later, he was back in business, contributing to the city's economic renewal. Coaxum now owns eight McDonald's franchises in New Orleans.

**Scott Smith, president and CEO of Collect, LLC, of St. Johnsville, N.Y.,** also received a Phoenix Award for ***Small Business Disaster Recovery***. Smith faced every business owner's nightmare when his company, a plastic foam manufacturer, was shut down for four months in the aftermath of a devastating flood. On June 28, 2006, torrential rains sent the Mohawk River spilling over its banks and 15 feet deep into Collect's 200,000-square-foot plant, causing an estimated \$10 million in damages and lost revenue. Smith took care of his employees first, organizing a meeting with the new York State Department of Labor to secure unemployment benefits for his 100 employees. Determined to save the company, Smith personally funded a portion of Collect's recovery. He received a \$1 million grant from the state of New York, and a \$1.5 million SBA disaster assistance loan. By October, Collect was fully operational, and Smith was able to put all of his employees back to work.

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**Kenneth Boswell, mayor of Enterprise, Ala.,** received the Phoenix Award for *Outstanding Contributions to Disaster Recovery by a Public Official*. On March 1, 2007, a killer tornado struck the south Alabama city. Immediately, Mayor Boswell urged frantic city workers to “calm down, answer the phone calls and give the appropriate information.” He soon learned two schools were destroyed, and eight teenagers were killed when a roof collapsed. Boswell contacted the parents, making grief counselors and clergy available. To protect the families from the media glare, Boswell had the children’s bodies removed from the rubble and taken to a local mortuary – instead of to the mobile morgue. The parents were able to grieve in privacy. Boswell’s quick thinking, leadership and communications skills guided Enterprise through the tragedy, and inspired the community to recovery together.

**Melinda W. Bygate of Summerfield, Fla.,** received the Phoenix Award for *Outstanding Contributions to Disaster recovery by a Volunteer*. After hearing the news about the destruction caused by the Lake County tornadoes on Feb. 2, 2007, Bygate gathered food, clothing, blankets and supplies from her home, and collected more from her neighbors. She drove her jeep filled with goods to the devastated town of Lady Lake, 12 miles away from Summerfield. A church collecting relief items told her no more volunteers were needed. She stayed anyway, and went along to help when she learned of another recovery agency that needed help picking up donated goods. Wanting to do more, she contacted a local cable TV station about publicizing the needs of disaster survivors. Bygate became a one-woman recovery agency – delivering goods, connecting survivors with services, visiting people in nursing homes and hospitals, providing transportation, and even negotiating with contractors and soliciting donations to defray rebuilding costs for some mobile home owners.

Since 1998, the SBA has presented Phoenix Awards to business owners and individuals who displayed courage, resourcefulness and tenacity in the aftermath of disasters, while contributing to the rebuilding of their communities.

The SBA makes low-interest, taxpayer-backed disaster loans to homeowners, renters and businesses of all sizes. In the aftermath of the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes, the SBA disbursed more than \$6.36 billion in disaster loans to about 120,000 hurricane survivors, the largest response in the agency’s 53-year history. To find out more about the SBA’s disaster assistance program, visit the SBA Web site at <http://www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance/index.html>.

For additional information on Small Business Week 2008, including a full schedule of events and information on all award winners, visit <http://www.nationalsmallbusinessweek.com/>

*The U.S. Small Business Administration thanks the following cosponsors of National Small Business Week and related events: Sam’s Club, Administaff, Raytheon, IBM, Chevron, The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Cisco, Lockheed Martin, Salesforce, Lowe’s, Banco Popular, Minority Business Development Agency, General Service Administration, MyBizHomepage, Dun & Bradstreet, National Association of Development Companies, Direct Selling Education Foundation, Association of Small Business Development Centers, National Small Business Association, Federal Allies Institute, SCORE, Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, National Federation of Independent Businesses, Consumer Energy Alliance, and FedSources.*

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