

By Phyl Newbeck
For The Colchester Sun

Every year the Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Northern Vermont hosts an awards banquet to celebrate the best in the industry. Referred to as the “Academy Awards” for builders, this year’s ceremony honored a number of Colchester businesses at the Sheraton Hotel in Burlington last month.

Over 375 people watched as builders from Colchester took home more than one-fourth of the 26 individual awards. Joe Sinagra, executive officer for Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Northern Vermont (HBRANV), said he wasn’t surprised that Colchester companies came away with so many prizes. “Colchester is a growing and striving community,” he said.

The HBRANV has more than 700 members, most of whom reside in Chittenden County. For the major awards such as Builder of the Year, members are solicited for nominees. Criteria include craftsmanship, quality of work, community involvement and investment in the industry. Members of a committee devoted to the task vote by secret ballot and the winning company doesn’t learn they have won the award until a video of their work is shown at the banquet.

This year, there were nine nominees, and the Builder of the Year award was given to Gardner Construction of Colchester.

“Gardner has been building for 30 years,” said Sinagra. “They have done so much for the industry and the quality of their work is second to none. It was exciting to honor them.”

Sinagra happened to be sitting at the same table as Charlotte Gardner when the award was announced and said he was pleased to see her shed tears of happiness.

“We were surrounded by people who knew,” Gardner reported, “but we didn’t have a clue. I was in total shock.”

An added bonus was that both of Gardner’s sons were on the podium. One made the initial presentation and the other came up to present Gardner and her husband with the engraved clock. In retrospect, she wishes she had had the time to prepare a speech.

“I really didn’t give a gracious or global enough thank you,” she said, noting that the audience included people from all kinds of related businesses from law to lighting to recycling to interiors. “It’s a wonderful honor,” she said. “The fact that its peer derived makes it all the nicer.”

For the more specific awards based on types of projects, individual builders are asked to submit a summary of their project including the length of time it took to complete and the materials used. They include pictures taken by a professional photographer. The same committee reviews the submissions after the builder’s name has been removed from the entry.

Sinagra said some categories have as many as seven nominees while others have as few as two or three. As with the larger awards, the winners don’t know that they have won until the award is presented. To ensure that nominees come to the banquet, those who enter projects are automatically given two tickets.

Four other Colchester builders went home with awards. Hergenrother Construction won the award for Best Condominium. Sinagra said the company has won more awards than any other builder. “When he enters a project, he usually wins,” Sinagra said. “That speaks volumes about him.”

Thomas Hergenrother Sr., the company's president counted out 21 awards on his wall in both commercial and residential areas. "It's still exciting to win," he said. In this case, the win was surprising because it was the first condominium project the company had undertaken.

Hergenrother said he entered his company in four or five categories, but rather than be upset by winning only one, he sounded rather pleased. "It's really nice to see everybody win something," he said. "I'm not a hog about it. There is some good competition. There are a lot of good guys doing good work."

For the third year in a row, Crowley Construction, Inc. left the banquet with the award for Best Renovated Kitchen. Owner/president Gary Crowley said his company doubled the size of the room from one which resembled an apartment kitchen to one where three people can work comfortably. A Colchester resident for 25 years, Crowley is a member of the HBRANV Remodeler's Counsel.

"There's a lot more competition in the remodeling business than people think," he said. "That's one of the things that keeps me on my toes."

Even though Crowley has won the award three years in a row, he is still honored by the appreciation of his work. "It's pretty exciting to be recognized," he said. "Remodelers are raising the bar all the time because we are constantly being challenged."

Vorse Construction took home two awards: one for Luxury Home costing under \$1 million, and one for Best New Kitchen. President/owner Brian Vorse, who recently became a resident of Colchester himself, is pleased that his company continued its tradition of winning HBRANV awards, which dates back to 1990. Both awards were for the same structure, which was built on Malletts Bay. The company specializes in higher end residential construction, but they also work in the commercial realm and do renovations. Vorse is particularly proud of a current project; a commercial renovation at the Village Cup in Jericho.

"It's always nice to be recognized and it's good for the people involved," said Vorse, noting that several members of his crew and some of his subcontractors came to the awards banquet. "It's a chance to give them some recognition and to let them have some ownership of the whole process and see the tangible proof of their labor," he said.

Bryan Ducharme and Mark Bonser are partners at TrueNorth Construction which won awards for Environmental Excellence and Most Innovative Design Build. The two awards were for the same house, which, according to Ducharme, was built for an environmental lawyer "who wanted to put his money where his mouth is." The building is LEEDS certified. Virtually everything in the house is either sustainable, local or both.

TrueNorth is a relatively new company, having been in business for less than five years. Environmentally sound buildings are their specialty and Ducharme said all their projects are rated five stars or better by Efficiency Vermont.

"We do our share of typical design to pay the bills," said Ducharme, "but this kind of project is what gets us out of bed in the morning. We just really like building cool houses."

TrueNorth has had a number of projects which they couldn't submit for awards because the homeowner was opposed to the idea so they were happy to be able to enter this one.

"It's always particularly nice," said Ducharme, "to be recognized by people in your industry. That has a special ring to it."

Charlotte Gardner is pleased the HBRANV awards ceremony draws attention to builders, citing statistics that 20 percent of the state's gross product is tied to the housing industry. Gardner remembers a field trip she took when one of her sons was in third grade. They looked at a construction site and tried to estimate how many people would work there, starting with

surveyors and engineers and site excavators. They determined that 150 people would cross the threshold to build the house; a number which didn't include bookkeepers, receptionists and manufacturers. "This is a very important industry," she said.

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Award winner

Vorse Construction took home two awards from the "Academy Awards" for home builders – one for Luxury Home costing under \$1 million, and one for Best New Kitchen. Both awards were for the same structure, which was built on Malletts Bay, according to company president/owner Brian Vorse, who recently became a resident of Colchester himself.

Photos by Daria Bishop

Homeawardsjump

This is one of the award-winning homes built by TrueNorth Construction of Colchester. Partners Bryan Ducharme and Mark Bonser won awards for Environmental Excellence and Most Innovative Design Build.

Photo by Robert Grego

Homeawardscrowley

For the third year in a row, Crowley Construction, Inc., won the award for Best Renovated Kitchen.

Photo by Mike Furey HomePage Publications

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Joe Sinagra

Executive officer of Home Builders and Remodelers Association

Colchester businesses lauded by Home Builders