

Local businesses honored at “Academy Awards” for builders

Home Builders

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For The Essex Reporter

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, the ceremony draws a large crowd. This year, more than 375 people had a chance to see Bouchard Pierce of Essex Junction receive a Lifetime Achievement Award.

The Lifetime Achievement Award is not handed out on an annual basis, according to Joe Sinagra, executive officer for the Home Builders (HBRANV). The last time the award was given was in 2005.

For this award, the more than 700 HBRANV members are solicited for nominees and a committee devoted to the task votes by secret ballot. The winning person/company doesn’t learn that they have won the award until a video of their work is shown at the banquet. This year’s banquet was held at the Sheraton in Burlington on Oct. 21.

“We take this one very seriously,” said Sinagra, noting that previous winners of the award included Dudley Davis, Bill Hauke and Adrien Thibault.

Sinagra praised Bouchard Pierce for their “strong dedication to the industry.” He noted that the company has been family-owned since 1976.

“They employ 20 people,” said Sinagra, “and they’ve given so much to the area. They could have left the business if they wanted to, but they chose to stay.”

Sinagra said many builders got their start working with Bouchard Pierce as subcontractors.

“They do so much for the economy,” said Sinagra. “They have supported the housing industry immensely. It was extra special to be able to honor them.”

Bob Bouchard’s parents started the company in 1976. Seven of their nine children worked there at one point, and three, including Bob, still do.

“We were pleasantly surprised,” Bouchard said. “It was a nice honor because the Home Builders are a very well run organization.”

Bouchard said his parents joined the HBRANV early on, even though they were not technically home builders. “It was important,” said Bouchard “to understand the relationship between our store and the building community.”

Bouchard admitted the award wasn’t a total surprise. “We had a bit of a hint,” he said, “so we were there in full force.”

Bouchard noted that home building impacts many other businesses in the state and is important to Vermont’s economy. “We’re proud to be a member of the organization,” he said, “and to work side by side with builders. Winning the award was immensely gratifying.”

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.

In Jericho, Leach Construction was the top vote-getter in two categories, winning for Commercial Renovation and Single Family Home under 3,000 square feet. Todd Leach, one of three partners in the firm together with his brother and sister-in-law, is proud of the energy-saving features in the winning single family home. The home was built on a site that previously held a trailer, allowing the company to use the existing foundation. It received a five star energy rating and has numerous features which will minimize the need for maintenance over the years such as a standing seam roof and fiber cement siding which looks like wood but is much easier and less expensive to maintain.

Leach Construction has won multiple awards in previous years including Builder of the Year in 2007, but the Commercial Renovation award was a first for them.

The renovations were performed on an art gallery in Stowe which sits on a ledge on the banks of a river. Leach said there is a 25-foot elevation drop from the parking lot to the base of the building. His company built an intricate third-story deck to increase display space. Even though they have been recognized in the past, Judy Leach said the family was still honored to take home two awards. "Our team takes great pride in delivering quality craftsmanship," she said.

Tom Moore Builder, Inc., of Underhill won an award for the Best Green Feature – not surprising since Moore is a member of the Underhill Energy Committee.

"We're focused on energy efficient homes," said Moore. "Everything we do needs to be on the 'green theme' because it's the right thing to do. We can't be polluting our environment. We need to think of the future of our children."

Moore noted that it is easier for small scale builders like him to concentrate on environmentally friendly homes.

"Some people are afraid of green because of cost and fear of change," he said, "and that's just a poor attitude."

Ryan Lawler served as the project manager for Moore's award winning house that was built in New York. Lawler said the house has several green heating features including a large photovoltaic array, a hot water heater that also serves to help the home's radiant heat, and a masonry heater.

In addition, the roof is made of recycled plastic, the siding and trim are composite, and the house is "super insulated." All the wood used for the house was locally harvested from a mill in Bristol.

"It was an honor," said Lawler, "to be involved in a project of that magnitude and that level of energy efficiency."

This is the first year that the Best Green Feature award was presented by HBRANV. "More and more customers have been asking builders to build 'greener' and add more 'green features,'" said Sinagra. "Green has become more mainstream."

Judy Leach of Leach Construction also cited the importance of green building noting that all the homes Leach builds are "energy efficient and environmentally responsible."

Moore agreed that green building is becoming more common.

"I've been building for over 40 years," he said, "and I've learned more in the past few years about green buildings and sustainability than at any other time."

Moore recently attended a 350.org event and came away impressed.

"I'm not afraid to try new stuff," he said, "and try to do the right thing."

