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TOP STORY

Hedrick named 'Small Businessperson of Year'

Badger Basement Systems owner feted

By Christine Spangler and Randall Dullum cspangler@dailyunion.com 1 hr ago



The Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce presented its Small Businessperson of the Year award to Jim Hedrick, founder of Badger Basement Systems, during the organization's fall open house at the Soulful Toad Tuesday evening. Shown above, chamber President Tom Dehnert, left, presents the award to Hedrick's daughters, Mary Lawrence, center, and Becky Peck, right, who accepted it on their father's behalf.

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A man who started at the bottom and rose step by step to the top of Fort Atkinson's business community was honored by the Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday evening.

Jim Hedrick, owner of Badger Basement Systems, was named Small Businessperson of the Year when the Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce gathered for its fall open house Tuesday evening at the Soulful Toad.

Chamber President Tom Dehnert explained that each year, the chamber recognizes a small business owner on the basis of growth, staying power, business accomplishments and community involvement. Past chamber presidents reviewed the nominations in August and selected this year's winner.

"This individual started his basement waterproofing and repair business in 1975 in his garage with one employee, but over 43 years, he's grown his staff to 52 people, almost all of whom live in the Fort Atkinson area, and many who have been with the company since the 1980s," Dehnert said of Hedrick. "In fact, employee turnover is so low, it is uncommon to find someone who has worked for this company for less than five years.

He quoted one employee, who commented, "I love that everyone here is like a big family and works together to help each other. It makes it a great place to work."

Another one said, "I enjoy being a part of helping people and having them call back with good reviews and knowing that they're 'wowed' by us. I love the flexibility and the easy-going work environment."

Dahnert noted that Hedrick began his business, located south of Fort Atkinson along U.S. Highway 12, with a simple goal of helping people in difficult situations, and word of his work spread to the point of needing to expand. He done so twice — once in 2000 and again in 2008 — and Badger Basement Systems now services customers throughout Wisconsin and northern Illinois.

"Community is also very important to this business," Dehnert said. "Employees have been volunteer bartenders for events at Koshkonong Mounds, Rhythm on the River and Fort Atkinson Generals games. The company donates funds to no less than 25 local charities and groups, and it helps sponsor the chamber golf outing, Rhythm on the River and Project LEAD."

The chamber president pointed out that this is not the first honor for Badger Basement Systems. In 2015, it was honored with the Achievement in Consumer Excellence from the National Association of Remodeling Industry; in 2016, it was named Wisconsin Family Business of the Year; and in 2018, it was presented the Better Business Bureau Torch Award for Ethics.

“Jim Hedrick would tell you that Mother Nature is responsible for the success of Badger Basement, and given the summers we’ve had lately, he could be right,” Dehnert said. “His favorite line when it rains is that ‘It’s raining pennies from heaven,’ and he has a rainstick that employees are known to dance around when things are slow.

“Jim didn’t get to where he is today by having all the answers,” Dehnert continued. “He encourages new ideas and has learned much of what he knows through trial and error. His three kids are now learning the ropes so they’ll be able to continue what Jim started when he retires. Said one employee, ‘He wants to make sure that we are around as long as our warranty: for a lifetime.’”

Accepting the Small Businessperson of the Year award on behalf of Hedrick were Mary Lawrence and Becky Peck, his daughters.

“Wow,” Lawrence remarked. “Emily Rueth is the one who nominated us – or Jim, I should say – for this award,” Lawrence said. “He’s currently enjoying semi-retirement and is in Florida, which is why we’re up here and he is not.”

She said they asked Jim what his thoughts were and what he would want people to know.

“His message was pretty clear, and that’s simply that we would not be where we are today as a business if it were not for all the great people that work with us,” Lawrence said. “So we went from him being the only employee to 52 employees. And I’m sure he never expected when he waterproofed the first basement, which was actually his first basement, that we would do \$8 million dollars in sales some years.

“So it’s been great to be a part of, and we are thankful for our team of great people at Badger Basement,” she said, “and we proudly accept this award on behalf of our dad.”

Nass presented a legislative citation to Badger Basement Systems.

He said that he and one of Jim’s employees, on occasion, late on Friday afternoons, get together at a bar in Whitewater and “solve all of the world’s problems.”

“My mom had told me long ago, ‘Steve, you’ve gotta live on the edge,’” Nass said. “She said that living on the edge may be a little nerve-wracking, but the view is awesome. And I took that to heart, and I gave myself challenges along the way.”

Hedrick, he said, also has challenged himself along the way.

“He is keeping challenges, and he now sees the view and how awesome it is for such a successful business,” Nass said. “Zig Ziegler said if people like you, they will listen to you. If they trust you, they will do business with you.”

Hedrick’s successful business, he said, shows that people all over Wisconsin trust him.

“And that’s critical in business,” Nass stated. “Trust is not something that you can market—you have to earn it.”

He said he always has felt — and Hedrick has lived this — that the purpose of life is to matter.

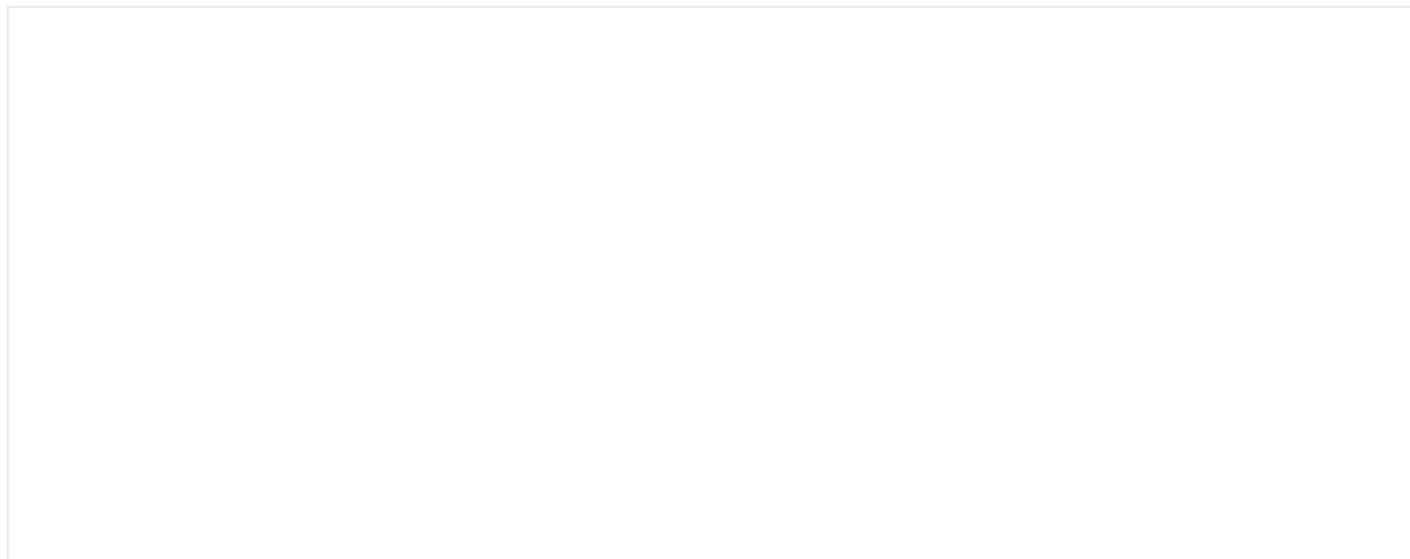
“To count for something ... to stand for something,” Nass said. “To have it make some difference that you lived at all.

“And Jim has certainly done that — not only with his business and his family, but right here in Fort Atkinson with the community and all of the assistance he has given to the various activities that go on in this community,” the senator added. “And he hasn’t held back from that.”

The legislative citations that both he and Rep. Horlacher present are not given out “helter-skelter,” he said, but, rather, “have to be earned.”

“And the (Friends of Lorine Niedecker, winner of the tourism award) group tonight and Jim have earned it,” Nass concluded.

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