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Knoxville Chamber Announces 2015 Pinnacle Award Winners

Nearly 800 people gathered at the Knoxville Convention Center on May 8 to celebrate the finalist and winners of the 11th annual Pinnacle Business Awards gala, presented by FSG Bank.

The gala kicked off with a reception and silent auction, sponsored by Comcast Business. Guests then transitioned into the convention center's ballroom to enjoy dinner and the awards program, emceed by WBIR's Robin Wilhoit.

Companies and individuals were recognized in nine award categories, which highlight the range of businesses that make up Knoxville's thriving, vibrant economy.

2015 Pinnacle award winners:

The **Impact Award**, sponsored by Publix Super Markets, is given to an East Tennessee non-charitable business committed to making the region a better place to live through the development and support of community projects or programs. This year's finalists were Gerdau, Prestige Cleaners/Prestige Tuxedo, and SunTrust Bank.

This year's winner is **Prestige Cleaners/Prestige Tuxedo**. President and Owner Eddie Mannis has long demonstrated a steadfast commitment to improving the community by providing hundreds of thousands of dollars in financial support to a wide range of non-profit organizations. Prestige Cleaners has been involved with the Knoxville Area Rescue Ministries' Coats for the Cold program for the last 14 years, cleaning more than 125,000 coats over that time. The company also supports Project Classroom, which provides year-around grants to support teachers and classrooms in Knox County Schools. Since its inception, the program has provided more than \$125,000 to area schools, impacting hundreds of K-12 students. In 2007, the company started Honor Air — Knoxville, which has flown more than 2,300 World War II and Korean War veterans of East Tennessee to Washington, D.C., to visit the memorials built in their honor. Prestige not only spearheads the organization, operation, and fundraising for this program, but has also donated close to \$420,000 to date to make the trips a reality.

The **Innovator Award**, presented by UT-Battelle, is given to an East Tennessee business that has developed a new technology, innovative product, or service, or applied a business system or service in an innovative way. Finalists this year were 1st Choice Franchise Concepts, Magnum Venus Products, and Proton Power.

Proton Power took home this year's award. Founded in 2005 by Sam C. Weaver and Dan L. Hensley, Proton Power is a sustainable energy company that has developed a technology to convert biomass material into a hydrogen-rich gas stream. The byproduct is then used to create heat, electricity, and liquid

fuels. Proton Power's first commercial client was Wampler's Farm Sausage, which received the Innovator Award in 2013. The company is currently in the early stages of commercialization with seven customers, and is constructing the first synthetic diesel facility in Rockwood, Tenn. The company and its technology has received global attention and is embarking on a period of significant growth both domestically and overseas.

The **Small Business Excellence Award**, presented by Sword & Shield Enterprise Security, honors an East Tennessee small business that has 50 employees or less company-wide. The winner demonstrates the ability to overcome obstacles as well as a historical index of growth in revenues and workforce. Finalists in this category were All Occasion Catering; Expoquip, Inc.; and Mac's Pharmacy.

This year's recipient is **All Occasion Catering**. Founded by Neal and Susan Green in 1990, All Occasion Catering is a premier provider of various catering services for events of all types and sizes in the Knoxville area. The company has 13 full-time staff members and 40 total employees. The Greens are not only small business owners, but also investors in the Knoxville community. The couple moved All Occasion Catering to a facility on North Central Avenue during the height of the recession in 2008. Since moving there, the company has doubled its business, with at least 15 percent in growth each year. All Occasion Catering is on the verge of opening a second venue in downtown Knoxville, with a long-term lease on a large portion of the Jackson Terminal building.

The **Minority-Owned Business Excellence Award**, presented by Covenant Health, recognizes companies that have achieved notable growth and are at least 51 percent owned by an ethnic minority. This year's finalists were B&B Lawn Service, Marc Nelson Denim, and Paramount Hospitality Management Company.

Marc Nelson Denim received this year's award. In 2011, Marcus Hall founded Marc Nelson Denim, a designer clothing and lifestyle brand that specializes in producing small-batch, limited designs. All of the company's apparel is designed, produced, and finished in the U.S. and predominately in the South. Marc Nelson Denim launched its first women's line in 2013, which included skinny jeans and "Daisy Duke" shorts. In 2014, Marc Nelson Denim opened its flagship store at 700 E. Depot Street. The company continues to grow, as Hall plans to expand the brand beyond 25 specialty stores located throughout the Southeast, to several chain and department stores.

The **Woman-Owned Business Excellence Award**, presented by Management Solutions LLC, is given to an outstanding East Tennessee woman-owned business. Companies must be at least 51 percent owned and operated by one or more women. Cannon & Cannon, Inc.; Moxley Carmichael, and Performance Training Inc. were finalists for this category.

This year's winner is **Cannon & Cannon, Inc.** Angie Cannon and husband, Harold, started Cannon & Cannon, Inc. in 1996 as full-service consulting engineering and field surveying firm. The firm has a diverse client base that includes public utilities; city, county and, state governments; departments of transportation; and institutional, industrial, and private developments. Cannon & Cannon's work helps ensure the safety and reliability of infrastructure of civil infrastructure. The firm operates an additional office in Brentwood, Tenn., and services clients in Western Kentucky and Middle Tennessee, in addition to the Knoxville area.

The **Business Excellence Award** is divided into a mid-sized category for businesses with 51-200 total employees, and a large category for those companies with 201 or more employees. The Business Excellence Awards recognize East Tennessee businesses that have shown remarkable profitability, growth, and stability. Companies must have a significant presence in East Tennessee and be nationally or internationally recognized in their respective sectors.

Finalists for the **Business Excellence Award (mid-size company)**, presented by Coulter & Justus, were Harper Auto Square; Johnson & Galyon, Inc; and Threds.

This year's recipient is **Harper Auto Square**. Synonymous with quality and luxury, Harper Auto Square has been serving Knoxville's automotive needs since 1981. The auto dealer group boasts luxury brands like Audi, Porsche, Jaguar, Infiniti, and Maserati, as well as more moderate brands like Volkswagen and FIAT. The company's impact on the local and state economy is significant, with an annual payroll of nearly \$10 million for its 196 employees, as well as generating more than \$10 million annually in state sales taxes. Harper has invested more than \$25 million in its facilities, with one new dealership under construction and two dealership remodel projects in waiting.

Finalists for the **Business Excellence Award (large company)**, presented by ARG Financial Staffing, included Blackberry Farm; Radio Systems Corporation; and Team Health Holdings, Inc.

This year's winner is **Radio Systems Corporation**. Founded by Randy Boyd in 1991, the company has long been committed to making the lives of pets and their owners happier. The company has 350 local associates at its West Knoxville headquarters, as well as 600 worldwide. Radio Systems Corporation produces 4,600 different pet products under brand names such as Invisible Fence, PetSafe, and SportDog. In addition to pet products, operates two PetSafe Village locations, which provide pet owners with daycare, boarding, grooming, and training services. Radio Systems Corporation has also established six dog parks throughout Knox County. This award marks the fourth different Pinnacle Business Award Radio Systems Corporation has received in the past 11 years. The company was honored with the Innovator Award in 2006, the Impact Award in 2013, and Randy Boyd was recognized as the 2014 James A. Haslam II Leadership Award winner.

The **Young Entrepreneur Award**, presented by FSG Bank, is presented to a young professional, 40 years of age or younger as of May 2, 2015, who lives and works in East Tennessee and has achieved success while overcoming obstacles, to become one of tomorrow's top business leaders. The winner will have started or is at risk in ownership in their non-franchisee business. They will have taken their business practices and moved a company from early growth to some maturity. Eric Barton of Vanquish Worldwide, Mike Brown of M&M Productions, and Bradford Jones of Bradford Catered Events were finalists for this year's award.

Eric Barton is the 2015 recipient. Barton started Vanquish Worldwide in 2007 as a government contracting provider. Today, in addition to handling government contracts, the company has expanded into a U.S. transportation and logistics business. In 2013 Vanquish Worldwide secured a preferred service provider contract with FedEx Ground and it now handles more than 40 percent of all packages that are shipped and received through the Nashville terminal. The company is headquartered in Maryville, but also has offices in Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Hawaii, North Carolina, and South Carolina; as well as international offices in Afghanistan, Uganda, and Iraq. Vanquish has 145 employees company-wide, and 54 locally. Barton is a veteran of the Marine Corps, serving as a senior analyst for the combined joint task force at the National Intelligence Center for the Horn of Africa. In addition to Vanquish Worldwide, Barton also owns just over 20 different business ventures.

The **James A. Haslam II Chairman's Leadership Award** is given to a longtime business leader that exhibits strength in character, resolve, and a commitment to the community, as well as has demonstrated exemplary success in the regional business community.

This year's honoree is **Dee Bagwell Haslam**.

Dee Haslam's roots run deep in Knoxville. A Webb School graduate, Haslam went on to earn a degree from the University of Tennessee. Her father, Ross Bagwell Sr., is known as the godfather of cable television in Knoxville and Dee started working in the family business when she was 17. His production company, Cinetel Productions was sold to Scripps Howard in 1994 and became Scripps Network Interactive.

In 1999, Haslam launched RIVR Media. As the CEO and founder, Haslam has turned a production company based in Knoxville, into a major player in the television production industry. RIVR has produced more than 100 series and documentaries, and was recently named one of the top 100 production companies in the world.

In addition to RIVR Media, Haslam is also the founder and CEO of RIVR Digital, which specializes in producing short form marketing and training digital content; and RIVR Media Studios, which is a leading provider of production equipment and services. In June of 2012, she started Nest Features, an independent film company that produces films in and about the American South.

Haslam has long been committed to the Knoxville community, serving in a multitude of leadership roles. Since becoming part owner of the Cleveland Browns NFL franchise in 2012, Dee has also become actively engaged in projects in Northeast Ohio. She serves as president of the Cleveland Browns Foundation.

The gala concluded with a toast to the winners, sponsored by Caris Healthcare.

The production of the 2015 Pinnacle Business Awards was made possible by assistance from All Occasions Party Rentals, M&M Productions, and Bandit Lites. Media sponsors for the event were *The Greater Knoxville Business Journal*, *Knoxville News Sentinel*, and NewsTalk 98.7. DMG|Bluegill Creative were the software sponsors for the event. EnergySolutions sponsored the printed programs for the event.