

My Chef Catering tops among Naperville small businesses

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Cook it and they will come.

The slightly altered famous mantra works well for Bill and Karen Garlough's robust Naperville business. The couple has whipped up what seems to be the perfect recipe for a successful catering operation: A dash of business know-how; a pinch of reliable, talented staff; and a heaping dose of philanthropy and community awareness.

The result is My Chef Catering, a 17-year-old company that has become synonymous with giving to those who need it most.

On Friday, My Chef Catering won the highly regarded Small Business of the Year Award, which is bestowed by the Naperville Area Chamber of Commerce. The business competed with 25 nominees for the title.

"To borrow from 'Field of Dreams,' 'Is this heaven?'" Bill Garlough said during his acceptance speech at the ninth annual event. "No, it's Naperville."

He said he was flattered and he and his wife couldn't be happier with their decision years ago to locate the business here.

"Naperville is just such a terrific town filled with people with passion and care for others. It's almost infectious," Garlough said. "I've never seen anything like it."

My Chef employees Dominick Scafidi and Debi Nolan described their bosses as kind individuals who encourage skill development and who run the shop more like a home than a workplace.

Friday's is the most recent in a string of honors that has put the happy couple on a winning streak. On Thursday, they picked up a major award at the annual dinner meeting of the Greater Aurora Chamber of Commerce. In March, the company was named one of two in the state to win a first-of-its-kind excellence award from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. In all, 60 businesses nationwide won the organization's new Blue Ribbon Small Business Award.



Karen and Bill Garlough, owners of My Chef Catering in Naperville, picked up the 2006 Small Business of the Year Award on Friday from the Naperville Area Chamber of Commerce. (Bev Horne/Daily Herald)

Garlough said he is excited to see where the awards take them.

"Hopefully it means a deepening involvement with area communities," he said. "Hopefully it means meeting more nice, caring people and broadening our circle. I think it will be a very enriching process."

My Chef is involved with about 30 not-for-profit groups every year. Primary examples include Cuisine for a Cause, which assists Naperville CARES, and Naperville Rotary's Oktoberfest.

Karen Garlough said she was still waiting for the news to sink in.

"Yippee!" she said, taking to the podium to accept the award. "Thank you so much... This is so great."

There were 38 nominees in all at Friday's awards ceremony. Twelve were not-for-profit agencies.

The individual category winners were:

- retail - Café Buonaro's, owners Ron and Tina Buonauro;
- professional - Klein, Hall & Associates accounting, owners Scott and Christina Klein;
- service, business-to-consumer - Inside-Out Painting Company, owner David Lockhart;
- service, business-to-business - My Chef Catering;
- not for profit - NCO Youth & Family Services, coordinator Beverly Garrett.

In addition, Ed Channell of Sound Incorporated was presented with the chamber's Lifetime Achievement Award for his years of community service.

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