



Business innovators, advocates honored

Dave Burge / El Paso Times

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Laura Sanchez-Miramontez, president of Access Remodeling & Construction, received the Women in Business Champion of the Year award Thursday at the 27th annual celebration of National Small Business Week luncheon at the Wyndham Hotel. (Rudy Gutierrez / El Paso Times)

EL PASO - Smaller can be better than big, said Susan Eisen, chief executive officer and chief designer for Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry & Watches.

Eisen was one of eight small-business owners and advocates who were honored during the the U.S. Small Business Administration's annual Small Business Week luncheon Thursday. About 200 business and community leaders attended the event at the Wyndham Hotel near the El Paso

airport to help celebrate local success stories.

"I love being a small-business owner," said Eisen, who was named the El Paso District Small Business Person of the Year. "It allows us to change in an instant, to redirect our efforts at the drop of a hat and to be on the floor interacting with every customer who walks through the door."

Eisen said U.S. small businesses are "overlooked as being the strongest piece of the American economy."

Award winners were judged by a committee organized and headed by SCORE, while SCORE and the El Paso Small Business Consortium organized the awards ceremony.

Phillip Silva, the SBA's El Paso District director, called small business the "backbone and heart of the American economy."

At least 65 percent of new jobs are created by small businesses nationwide, Silva said.

Small businesses' abilities to be innovative will be a key factor in helping to turn around the nation's economy during the global recession, Silva said.

The federal stimulus package, signed into law by President Obama in February, gave the SBA \$730 million of additional money to expand its loan and other programs, Silva said. The SBA does not issue loans, but guarantees them.

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The SBA will waive its fees and increase its loan guarantee ceiling to 90 percent on most of its loan programs, Silva said.

Susan Mucha, president and owner of Powell-Mucha Consulting Inc., was named the Region 6 winner of the Home-Based Business Champion of the Year, beating out other home-based businesses in five states.

Small businesses, Mucha said, will provide opportunities for laid-off workers to start earning a living again and adapt to changes in the nation's economy.

"We're seeing some of the best and brightest get displaced right now - not because they want to get rid of them, but because their companies have experienced reversals," Mucha said. Starting a small business "is an opportunity to find a new way to contribute faster than waiting for large companies to call them back."

Terri Reed, senior vice president of entrepreneurial development for the El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and project director for the chamber's Minority Business Enterprise Center, said small business is "vitaly important" to both the national and El Paso economies.

"Small business is a constant," Reed said. "They are risk takers, they're very innovative and they work tremendously hard."

The Minority Business Enterprise Center was named the El Paso District Minority Small

Business Champion of the Year.

Laura Sanchez-Miramontez, president and CEO of Access Remodeling & Construction Co., was named the Women in Business Champion of the Year.

Sanchez-Miramontez, who grew up working in her parents' construction companies, said they were her inspiration to start her own company 10 years ago.

"They are my heroes," she said, fighting back tears as she accepted her award.

Later, she said her advice to anyone who wants to start their own company is to "believe in yourself, even when no one else will. I believed in myself when everyone said I couldn't do it, I told them I could. You have to love what you do. Otherwise, you won't be happy and you won't make your customers happy."

Minda Villarreal, vice president of the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce's business development division, agreed that small businesses are a crucial but often unheralded part of the economy.

"That's how big business starts - as a small business," she said.

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SBA award winners

SBA's Small Business Week awards for 2009

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winners:

El Paso District Small Business Person of the Year: Susan Eisen, chief executive officer and chief designer, Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry & Watches.

Region 6 Home-Based Business Champion of the Year: Susan Mucha, president, Powell-Mucha Consulting Inc.

El Paso District Women in Business Champion of the Year: Laura Sanchez-Miramontez, president and CEO, Access Remodeling & Construction Inc.

El Paso District Financial Services Champion of the Year: Joseph Feldman, certified public accountant.

El Paso District Small Business Journalist of the Year: Tom Fenton, publisher, El Paso Inc.

El Paso District Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year: Carlos Rivera, president, Veterans Business Association.

El Paso District Jeffrey Butland Family-Owned Business of the Year: Filbert Candelaria, president, Adam Torres, vice president, and George Candelaria, secretary-treasurer, Three C's Contractors Inc.

El Paso District Minority Small Business Champion of the Year: Terri Reed, project director, El Paso Minority Business Enterprise Center.

Small businesses' impact

Small businesses create at least 65 percent of all new jobs in the United States.

Small businesses make up 98 percent of all Texas employers.

Small businesses employ 47 percent of Texas' nonfarm private-sector workers.

Small businesses produce 13 to 14 times as many patents as larger companies.

Small businesses account for 97 percent of America's exporters and produce 26 percent of all U.S. export value.

Source: Small Business Administration.

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