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30TH ANNUAL MANATEE SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR AWARDS | Winners, Pages 2-3F

Saluting business survival and acumen

By BRIAN NEILL
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BRADENTON — It was a time for celebration in a time when everyone needs something to celebrate.

The 30th annual Manatee Small Business of the Year awards Thursday were as much about survival as busi-

ness acumen. Each of the five winners discussed the challenges they have faced in the current economy.

But winners still managed to stay afloat and go the extra mile by giving back to the community.

Darrell Turner, owner of Turner Tree and Landscape, was the recipient of the first-

ever Paul Bartley Community Service Award.

Turner was honored for his volunteerism on the boards of agencies such as the Manatee Chamber, the Gulfcoast Business Exchange Service and Meals on Wheels Plus, and for donations to various causes and entities including the Boys & Girls

Club, Manatee Glens and the Crowley Museum and Nature Center.

The award is named after former Bradenton Herald photographer Paul Bartley, who was closely tied to the community.

"I was definitely touched,"

AWARDS TO 7A

Daniel Turner, owner of Turner Tree and Landscape, left, is presented with the Paul Bartley Community Service Award by David Bassett, senior vice president at Morgan Stanley-Smith Barney in Bradenton.

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Turner said, "Very honored. The Paul Bartley award means a lot to me. Paul was a great guy."

Turner said the economy has been tough.

"We've had to lay off about 90 people, which has really been tough," he said. "But we still have 80 to 85 that we're keeping busy and we're seeing things starting to turn around and we're getting busier."

Turner Tree and Landscape falls into the category of gross sales over \$10 million.

Mary Bennett was surprised by her winning Small Business of the Year in the category of businesses with gross sales under \$1 million.

Bennett owns Campus Books on the campus of Manatee Community College.

She said the win was bittersweet. Bennett lost her husband unexpectedly last year and he was unable to celebrate

the award with her.

"I do wish that we had thought to join the chamber sooner," Bennett said.

"If we had done that a few years ago, maybe my husband would have been alive to receive this award, because he was really the brains who started it."

Other winners included On a Shoestring Inc. running and walking specialty store in the under \$500,000 in gross sales category; Suncoast Gem in the under \$2.5

million category; and Coastal Orthopedics & Pain Management in the under \$10 million category.

Neil Spirtas, vice president, public affairs with the Manatee Chamber of Commerce, said the competition was tough to judge because of all the qualified businesses — 29 in all — that were in the running.

"This was the toughest year," Spirtas said. "We had some good companies. There was a lot of passion."