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Studio 107 wins business award

Beauty salon named small business of the year; owner had a challenging year expanding for clients

By Chris Jurewicz
Staff Writer

She didn't want to be known as the pre-1999 Susan Lucci of the St. Albert Business Awards of Distinction.

When Diane Sabirsh found out her hair salon, Studio 107, was once again nominated for the Small Business Award of Distinction, she didn't mention it to clients.

Sabirsh said she feared being like Lucci, the American actress who won Best Actress at the 1999 Emmy Awards after coming up empty in 18 previous nominations.

But Sabirsh knew she had a good chance of winning, given all the hurdles her staff have worked to get over during the last year. On Thursday, Sabirsh's wish came true as Studio 107 was named small business of the year.

"It's mindboggling, it's overwhelming, it's just wonderful. It's the icing on the cake," said Sabirsh after the celebration at the St. Albert Inn. "I took it much more lightly this year even though I wanted it even deeper. I didn't want to tell the whole world and be all excited and then be let down, especially when I saw the list and I thought that I didn't have a chance.

"There were so many great businesses. But when I looked at the list in more detail, I thought, 'I don't think they went through quite the ordeals that I might have in the last year.' "

Among the challenges Sabirsh had to deal with was making room for staff from Hair Shaft, a salon that closed down earlier this year.

When she added the employees, Sabirsh's payroll jumped to 23 full and part-time workers. Her business opened in 1992 in the Business Development Centre (now called the Northern Alberta Business Incubator) and moved in 1994 to the current location on Inglewood Dr.

Sabirsh said she has always been committed to succeeding in St. Albert.

"I'm staying in St. Albert for ever and ever. I was born and raised here and I wouldn't dream of moving my business anywhere else," she said. "It's the friendships that we build; it's so comfortable. People know where I

live, they know my boyfriend's name. It's just a real tight community."

The first award handed out on Thursday was to Alberta Paramedical Services Ltd., which took the Business to Business Award of Distinction. Alberta Paramedical, located in Riel Business Park, has been in operation since 1988 and is committed to providing the best possible medical treatment and transportation for injured and/or sick individuals.

The Marketing Award of Distinction, meanwhile, was given to CruiseShipCenters. St. Albert CruiseShipCenters operates its own Web site, which includes all the information necessary for people to make a decision about a dream holiday.

Dream is not a description Leanne Mowbray will ever use for her first day on the job. The owner of MooTastic opened the downtown ice cream shop on June 28, 2002. That day, her father suffered a heart attack, the air conditioning system failed, the first order of ice cream melted and a freezer flooded the store.

Despite the initial challenges, Mowbray persevered and MooTastic enjoyed a 27 per cent increase in summer sales this year compared with last.

For her efforts, Mowbray was given the Young Entrepreneur Award.

The Info Tech Award was given to BITNETS Inc., an Internet consulting firm that has been in operation since 1999 and the final tribute of the night was given to Standard General Inc., winner of this year's President's Award. The business has operated in St. Albert for almost 30 years and employees have built 85 per cent of city roads during that time.

The awards night brought together small business owners, City of St. Albert representatives and local and provincial politicians to celebrate the achievements of the last year. Chamber of commerce president Jan Butler called the event St. Albert's version of the Academy Awards for small business. After she spoke, Ald. Curtis Stewart went to the microphone and introduced himself as Billy Crystal, one of many jokes that prompted chuckles from those in attendance.

On a more serious note, Stewart said that last year, St. Albert's 2,350 licensed businesses contributed \$5.8 million in taxes.

"It is your continued effort that makes St. Albert the great city that it is," said Stewart.

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