



**U.S. SMALL BUSINESS
ADMINISTRATION**
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PRESS RELEASE

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SBA, L.A. Area Chamber To Present 25th Annual Small Business Awards May 31

LOS ANGELES – The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) today announced the Los Angeles District Office winners of their annual Small Business Awards competition. The Los Angeles SBA Office covers Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties.

The Awards will be presented to the Small Business Person of the Year and Champions in eight categories at the 25th Annual Small Business Awards luncheon to be held from 11:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. on Wednesday, May 31, 2006 at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. SBA Administrator Hector Barreto will preside over the awards and address the honorees as Keynote Speaker. The luncheon is presented by the SBA and the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce.

“We take great pride in announcing our District winners who exemplify what our free enterprise system is all about,” said Alberto G. Alvarado, Los Angeles SBA District

Director. “These men and woman of small enterprise, but big dreams, epitomize the true meaning of entrepreneurship. Despite significant risk they have achieved substantial commercial success and are also very active in community service. I commend them for their excellent accomplishments. A common tread shared among many of these entrepreneurs is the use of the SBA’s programs and services to leverage their companies. As the elite of the Los Angeles area small business community, they are deserving of much praise.”

“Los Angeles is the small business capital of the nation. Our diverse, creative, and energetic small business community powers the regional economy and is a source of constant innovation,” said L.A. Area Chamber Board Chair Dave Nichols, AT&T. “The Chamber works every day on behalf of small business, and we’re proud to partner with the SBA each year to celebrate their achievements.”

A list and bios of award winners is attached. To receive information describing the criteria for the Small Business Week Awards competition, call (818) 552-3203. To make reservations for the Luncheon, call the Chamber at (213) 580-7585. All winners are available for interviews. Call Frank Brancale at (818) 552-3203.

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About the U.S. Small Business Administration

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is the foremost provider of capital access and technical business assistance to our Nation's entrepreneurs. The Los Angeles District Office is the Agency's most productive office. For more information, visit www.sba.gov.

About the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce

The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce represents the interests of business in L.A. County. Founded in 1888, the Chamber promotes a prosperous economy and quality of life in the Los Angeles region. For more information, visit www.lachamber.org.

2006 Small Business Award Winners

Small Business Person of the Year	Igor Pasternak CEO Worldwide Aeros Corp
Financial Services Champion of the Year	Rita Mitchell Vice President, Regional Sales Manager Wachovia Small business Capital
Home-Based Business Champion of the Year	Ceil Hansen President HCW
Minority Small Business Champion of the Year	Bob Holguin Director North Los Angeles Small Business Development Center
Small Business Exporter of the Year	Helen Keane President Video Products Group, Inc.
Small Business Journalist of the Year	Louis Barajas President / CEO Louis Barajas Wealth and Business Planning
Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year	Joseph Velasco III Veterans Employment Representative –EDD Employment Service Office
Women in Business Champion of the Year	Audrey Martinez-Keller President / CEO Dolphin Data Corp.
Jeffery Butland Family-Owned Business of the Year	Jose F. and Patricia Jimenez (co-owners) DBA LA Cabanita

2006 Small Business Award Winner Profiles

Small Business Person of the Year Igor Pasternak
CEO
Worldwide Aeros Corp

The SBA Small Business Person of the Year, Igor Pasternak, is an imaginative innovator who provides creativity and leadership for Worldwide Aeros Corp, a leading lighter-than-air airship design and manufacturing company. He originally founded his firm in the Ukraine to produce blimps and other high-quality aeronautics products for the European market and later moved to the United States to avail Aeros of substantial opportunities to further expand its operations.

The technology of this mini-multinational has attracted much attention on the international market. Its aerostat line of products offers significant uses in national security and surveillance. Trinidad and Tobago employ an Aeros blimp to control coastal operations and fight drug trafficking in the Caribbean. Aeros recently announced an agreement in principle with a large Chinese organization to develop and market a new family of freight-moving vehicles, called the Aeroscraft.

Igor Pasternak is extremely up-beat in that all indications show Aeros is poised on the brink of an extremely promising future. Its proprietary products have provided it a competitive edge. The company sales trend remains fortuitous, underscored by exceptional revenue improvement experienced during the first half of fiscal 2005. The state of the world-wide geopolitical economy continues to exert strong demand for

Aeros' unique product line, especially its technology rich aerostat monitoring devices. Also, during the last several years employment opportunities at Aeros grew nearly four fold, reflecting management's aspirations for dynamic near-term growth. This little technology gem is ready to take flight.

Los Angeles SBA District Director Alberto G. Alvarado commended Igor Pasternak's wisdom and enterprising spirit, stating, "Igor Pasternak's company has taken the journey from the conceptualization and creative genius state, through the difficult and fraught-with-pitfalls research and developmental stage, arriving at the dividend point whereby that genius is now being rewarded. As a true entrepreneur, he assumed staggering risk to achieve this dream and succeeded against heavy odds. In the process he created 50 jobs contributing to his community's economic development. This successful trek of this American immigrant business is exemplary and praiseworthy as a model for all aspiring small business owners. May good news remain in the wind for Igor and Aeros."

Financial Services Champion of the Year

Rita Mitchell
Vice President, Regional Sales Manager
Wachovia Small business Capital

Rita Mitchell was selected for her tenacity and untiring dedication to the cause of capital access for entrepreneurs of all walks of life, particularly the underserved. Her customer-centric management style was developed during more than a quarter century of banking, and was tempered further during a decade-long period of working as a partner with her husband Rick in Casillas Financial, a firm specializing in loan packaging and brokering of SBA loans. At Casillas Financial, Rita operated as the turnkey SBA lending

assist with the daily business challenges facing the solo practitioner or the small office entity.

With the average home-based operation often under tight marketing budget constraints, it is imperative that the small business owner be creative in successfully prospecting for new and on-going revenue sources, to be able to compete effectively. This is often the point where Ceil provides valuable assistance. HCW focuses on the small entity's strategic use of technology and how it is best utilized to market the firm's products and services. Many small businesses have substantial investments in tech-assets. In many instances, managements in these businesses fail to optimize marketing opportunities available via the computer and the internet. HCW has a wealth of resources which can be referenced to enhance marketing programs.

Ceil Hansen also teaches by example. Just as she leverages her assets through partnership arrangements with other organizations, she instructs her small business clients about the merits of successful networking and association building. This outreach approach often includes pro bono consulting and seminar presentations, as is the case with many of the gratis workshops Ceil developed for presentation to Veteran- owned start-up and existing business owners.

**Minority Small Business Champion
of the Year**

Bob Holguin
Director
North Los Angeles Small Business
Development Center

As Director of the North Los Angeles Small Business Development Center, one of the nation's largest providers of managerial and technical assistance to start-up, fledgling, and existing small enterprises, Bob Holguin worked tirelessly to champion minority business development. Under his direction significant improvements to the network or delivery systems used to purvey pro bono business assistance and entrepreneurial training to minority-owned firms were conceptualized, evaluated for practicality, and implemented, thus helping to fertilize and pollinate a small business landscape with a population approaching 12 million and covering three counties. North LA SBDC, under his leadership and resourcefulness, doubled in size in three short years. Within that time-frame, Bob dramatically increased the number of staff proficient in two or more languages. As a result his organization offered training and assistance in Spanish, Armenian, and six Asian and Pacific Islander dialects.

Leveraging the bilingual ability of his professional staff, Bob helped his SBDC redirect its focus to better serve the needs of the Dynamic Markets, comprised of minority-owned, women and veteran-owned small businesses. This strategy was implemented in unison with the expansion of the number of service sites resulting from Bob's input and the hi-level rethinking of how the SBDC could best reach and serve its clients. It is quite evident that the entity which developed a tri-county coverage utilizing 6 satellites and 5 outreach locations under the control of a main office bears no resemblance to the one-location organization of the last decade. With this efficient network under his direction, Bob was able to provide valuable assistance to six thousand minority business owners, and in the process 100 new minority-owned businesses were created, leading to

substantial employment opportunities. Economic development enthusiasts have Bob Holguin to thank for these advancements.

Small Business Exporter of the Year Helen Keane
President
Video Products Group, Inc.

Helen Keane founded Video Products Group, Inc. (VPG) in 1986 as a provider of advanced technology, video-transport solutions equipment. Its customer base consists of buyers seeking broadcast contribution quality video signals that are delivered error free in real time over long distances. A tribute to Ms. Keane's business acumen is the fact that she was able to form the company two decades ago by relying on various partnerships between, Corning, Plessey, IBM, British Telecom, DuPont, and Hewlett Packard. Under her watchful eye, the company incurred rapid growth by offering its customers a wide selection of innovative, high value-added digital video products that combined the latest advances in optical communications, long-haul transport, data communications, and video technologies.

CEO Keane further enhanced corporate growth through international sales expansion, which was partially funded by multiple SBA loans. Her success was also bolstered through the efforts of Trade Specialist Maura Kim of the U.S. Export Assistance Center in West Los Angeles who helped VPG establish a greater presence in Europe and Asia.

Today, in its highly-competitive global economy, VPG's propitious niche is both protected and broadened by a dedicated team of 35 employees who insure that the company marketing goals are attained. This performance has led to solid distribution relationships in North America, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, Brazil, and the United Kingdom, to name a few. In the spirit of a true champion, Helen Keane took on great risk, overcame the barriers to multi-national participation, and carved out her company's rightful stake in the export arena.

Small Business Journalist of the Year

Louis Barajas
President / CEO
Louis Barajas Wealth and Business Planning

Louis Barajas is a certified financial planner and founder of Louis Barajas Wealth and Business Planning. He is also a principal in Financial Greatness Inc., a firm that offers finance and investment related books. Until recently, Mr. Barajas was also a principal in Barajas & Torres, a professional accountancy and business consulting firm. In 2003, Louis Barajas' first book, *The Latino Journey to Financial Greatness* was published by HarperCollins. His second book, *Entrepreneurial Greatness: 5 Steps to Creating a Great Life from a Small Business*, is in the works. It will literally honor the underserved small business owners--the ones who grapple with and survive the arduous daily battle, and in the process overcome great odds.

During the last 15 years, Louis Barajas has championed the cause of the Dynamic Markets -- the underserved small business owner. Louis offered numerous free

workshops to advance the cause of small firms, and especially, inner-city and East LA entrepreneurs. He became nationally recognized as an expert in small business consulting and their finances. From 1997 to 2001 he published more than 200 articles for the business section of *La Opinion*. Louis Barajas served as the small business expert for AOL Latino, where he answered the weekly business questions posed on American On Line Latino. He also hosted a monthly live web chat covering small business issues.

**Veteran Small Business Champion
of the Year**

Joseph Velasco III
Veterans Employment Representative –EDD
Employment Service Office

Joseph Velasco is Veterans Employment Representative- EDD in Norwalk, CA. From this highly visible position he often impacts the lives of veteran entrepreneurs who seek his counsel. Under his direction workshops are made available for veterans to receive training on SBA programs and technical assistance. With his excellent working partnership providing access to the SBA's specially designated Veterans Representative, Mr. Velasco has the ability to provide significant small business information and resources to fuel an ever growing interest in entrepreneurship on the part of his veteran clients.

As a result Joseph Velasco has been able to create an enterprise nurturing climate in which small business ownership is readily discussed as a career option. In fact, hundreds of veterans have availed themselves of workshops and training to increase their business knowledge and better grasp the steps leading to the attainment of an improved livelihood.

Through his intervention a dozen veterans have strongly considered opening their own enterprises and have discussed the critical milestones necessary to make it happen. Three veterans have progressed further and actually begun their own ventures.

Women in Business Champion of the Year

Audrey Martinez-Keller
President / CEO
Dolphin Data Corp.

As founder and CEO of Dolphin Data Corp., Audrey Martinez-Keller is no newcomer to small business management. During 16 years of operations, Ms. Martinez-Keller has grown her small locally focused data processing and direct marketing firm into a nationally recognized enterprise. During the process she judiciously aligned Dolphin Data Corp with a large fulfillment and telemarketing company that aggressively serviced markets throughout the nation. The combination added punch to Dolphin Data's posture, allowing it to offer its customers access to services 24/7 at sites located on both coasts and with a staffing level of just under 200 employees.

Throughout her entrepreneurial career, Ms. Martinez-Keller has continuously encouraged women to become involved in the realm of small business and has freely offered her assistance to her "sisters in enterprise". This spirit of collegiality is currently manifested in her present position as President of the National Association of Women Business Owners-Los Angeles Chapter (NAWBO-LA). In this capacity, Martinez-Keller has entrée to the minds and hearts of more than 335,000 woman-owned businesses in the Los Angeles and Long Beach area and inspirationally serves as an ever-vigilant sentinel to

advocate for woman-business issues for her constituency. The success of her sphere of influence was confirmed by the more than 1,000 women entrepreneurs who turned-out to attend the recent NAWBO-LA luncheon held at the Beverly Hills Hilton.

**Jeffery Butland Family-Owned
Business of the Year**

Jose F. and Patricia Jimenez (co-owners)
DBA LA Cabanita

To observe the operations of the Jimenez's restaurant, La Cabanita, is to bear witness to the workings of the typical Family-Owned business. As is usual three generations or more come together to achieve success. Grandmother takes charge of the kitchen, turning her recipes into culinary wonders. Husband and wife oversee the food purchases, payroll, bill paying and strive to maintain that continuity of service to ensure consistency of product- - including presentation, taste, and price point. Children wait on tables or wash dishes as preparation to succeed parents as future management. It is valuable learning from the bottom up.

La Cabanita came into existence in 1989 when Jose and Patricia Jimenez decided that Angelenos should have the opportunity to avail themselves of authentic cuisine particular to Mexico City. Their establishment caught on as demand for the homey hearty dishes drew repeat business from an increasing loyal following. After years of sustained revenues Jose and Patricia seized the opportunity to grow their business and purchased the adjacent building. This acquisition increased capacity from a somewhat limited 40 seats to capacity for well over 100 diners. In addition, La Cabanita now offers a private banquet room with its own bar and entrance way. As a result, the restaurant's revenues

and profits have dramatically improved and provided significant employment opportunities.

Jose and Patricia Jimenez epitomize the struggles faced by family-owned and operated businesses, especially a restaurant which is often fraught with its own set of industry specific challengers. These entrepreneurs exhibited a tireless dedication to ensure that their restaurant not only survived, but prospered. They overcame extreme adversity and substantial risk in achieving their goals to create a future for their family and in the process have provided economic development and 36 jobs to their community.

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