It's not the Emmys, but some local businesses are stars

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OK, so the audience wasn't sporting a lot of bling. The stars pulled up in Hondas and Volvos, not sports cars and limos. And there were no glitzy after-parties - or at least none to which I was invited.

Still, following closely on the heels of the Emmy Awards, on Sept. 21 the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce rolled out its own red carpet for the second annual Emerald Awards at the Hult Center. The awards celebrate the business of community and honor those with starring roles.

The Emerald Awards recognize our very own stars here in Lane County - the businesses that look beyond the bottom line to create a community in which our families can thrive.

Few would argue the fact that local businesses play an essential role in our community's livability. Providing job opportunities, competitive wages and valuable goods and services are all fundamental and necessary ingredients of a vibrant local economy.

But it doesn't stop there. Local businesses enhance our enviable quality of life by contributing to the health of our environment, the quality of our schools, the abundance of our parks and the success of treasured service organizations. And that's what the Emerald Awards are all about.

These are businesses that recognize that our community is only as strong as the weakest among us. In lean times and lush, they understand that their success is inextricably linked to the vitality of our entire community.

More than 400 business and community leaders turned out for the announcement of the winners. The categories included job growth, innovation, community caring and environmental values. Sure, we heard from the likes of Bill Barrett and Rick Dancer instead of Ellen Degeneres, but our paparazzi were much more polite.

The job growth award went to GloryBee Foods, which got its start in Dick and Pat Turanski's garage almost 30 years ago. Now with 92 employees, the company has increased its work force by 37 percent in the past two years and continues to provide a steady flow of new employment opportunities. GloryBee Foods truly cares about its employees and the greater community, and is committed to providing steady incomes for local families.

Emerald Valley Kitchen took home the environmental values award for implementing a variety of environmentally friendly practices - including waste reduction, promoting energy efficiency, recycling, donating $40,000 to ecologi causes and supporting organic agriculture. The maker of salsa, bean dips and hummus is a leader in its industry.
ingredients and has won state and national awards for its social and environmental responsibility.

Siuslaw Financial Group received the community caring award for going above and beyond in the realm of volunteerism. The organization compensates its employees to volunteer up to 40 hours each year and has significant scholarship contributions to local schools, rewarding high school seniors committed to community volunteerism. Siuslaw also implemented an innovative event that raised $6,500 for local artists and $2,500 for local nonprofit organizations. Last year, its employees raised more than $57,000 for the United Way of Lane County.

Hydra Cool Inc. received the Emerald Award for innovation. Recently recognized as one of the top three new innovators at the nationally recognized Mid-America Trucking Show, Hydra Cool has put Eugene on the map as the nation's incubator for new refrigeration technology. The company created a transportation refrigeration system recognized for its energy savings, cost-effectiveness and environmental benefits.

Emerald Award winners were selected from more than 70 nominations in the four categories. The finalists were Forrest Paint, Gaydos Churnside and Balthrop, Language Learning Solutions, Market of Choice, Monaco Coach Medical Laboratories, Pacific Cascade Federal Credit Union and Rexius.

As one of the finalists, I can say - without a hint of bitterness or sarcasm - that it's an honor just to be non-proud to be in such good company. These businesses are but a few examples of our local stars; hundred businesses are helping our community each and every day. I encourage everyone to join me in applauding these businesses for their commitment to our community and to making ours an even better place to live and work.

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