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### 2009 Best of Springs Business

by Staff Writer  
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Welcome to the Business Journal's 2009 edition of the Best of Colorado Springs Business.

For the fifth year, readers have weighed in about their favorite businesses. This year, readers cast 47,249 votes for businesses in 98 categories.

For voter convenience, the votes were cast online through CSBJ.com.

Some of this year's businesses are winners for the third or fourth years in a row, but some have toppled from the top spot.

So, browse through the following pages and see who ranked as the best for 2009.

This year's profiles were written by Jim Sojourner and CSBJ staff writers.

#### Best Accounting Firm

##### Stockman Kast Ryan and Co.

Tax season might be over and rebate checks already received, but CSBJ readers once again voted that whether it's tax time or not, Stockman Kast Ryan and Co. is the accounting firm Springs business owners should trust to make sure their finances are in order.

Located at 102 N. Cascade Ave., the accounting firm is the largest, locally owned certified public accounting firm in southern Colorado. It provides clients with tax, audit and consulting services.

CEO Dave Kast said the firm's employees are its greatest asset, and he said the company works hard to hire the right people who fit into the business's culture.

"We're here to serve our clients," Kast said, adding that if clients think the firm is doing a good job, it has done its job correctly.

Each of SKR's 10 partners has more than 19 years of public accounting experience in an array of fields.

Runners-up: *BiggsKofford P.C.*, *BKD LLP*

#### Best Advertising Agency

##### Vladimir Jones

A lot has changed in the marketing world, including the company name, since Vladimir Jones started its advertising business more than 30 years ago. What hasn't, according to CSBJ readers, is the quality of its work.

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- Sunday, July 19
  - El Paso County Fair**
- Monday, July 20
  - El Paso County Fair**
- Tuesday, July 21
  - El Paso County Fair**

President Meredith Vaughan said she chalks the company's continued success up to three main reasons: her employees, a "laser-like" focus on clients and an ability to balance business objectives with "smart and innovative tactics."

"We just have amazing people," Vaughan said, "Passionate, dedicated people."

Despite the growth it has experienced, Vaughan said Vladimir Jones always keeps its focus exactly where it should be: on the client.

She said the company works to meet the specific needs of each client, no matter its size, by evaluating how to best match a marketing strategy with the client's business strategy in a creative manner without being creative simply for creativity's sake.

*Runners-up: Cukjati Design and Advertising, Sandia Advertising and Marketing*

## Best After-Work Bar

### SouthSide Johnny's

Whether it's the drinks, music, crowd or atmosphere that attract customers to SouthSide Johnny's, for the second year in a row CSBJ readers agree that it is the place to be after work.

Owner Johnny Nolan attributed his bar's success to the "good variety" it offers, including an array of food and music that attracts an eclectic group of "rich, poor, young, old" customers. Nolan said he also takes a lot of pride in keeping a staff that attends to his patrons' needs and gets them their drinks and food fast.

Located at 528 S. Tejon St., SouthSide Johnny's features live music and entertainment every night, and has brunch, lunch and dinner menus. It boasts an extensive beer, wine and martini list, and customers can book the banquet room or martini lounge for private parties of 20 or more.

*Runners-up: Ritz Grill, Oscar's Oyster Bar*

## Best Airline for Business Travel

### United Airlines

While many Springs business owners might be trying to cut costs amid the troubled economy, air travel remains an expensive reality for those hoping to do business on a national scale, and CSBJ readers once again voted United Airlines as the best airline for those business trips.

About 30 percent of the 2 million travelers who pass through the Colorado Springs Airport choose to travel on a United aircraft. The airline operates nearly 3,000 flights a day to more than 200 destinations from its travel hubs in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Denver.

According to its Web site, United knows the only acceptable flight experience is one that gets its passengers to their destinations safely and on time. The company also strives to minimize the inconvenience caused by uncontrollable events such as weather delays, a must for business travelers who hope to make their excursions quick and efficient.

*Runners-up: Frontier Airlines, Southwest Airlines*

## Best Architectural Firm

### Comstock & Associates Inc.

From its headquarters on Cascade Ave., Comstock and Associates Inc. has masterminded the design of high rises, shopping centers, restaurants and various other structures across America.

This year, it also was voted the best architectural firm in the Springs.

Despite working across the nation, President Doug Comstock said his company has retained its ability to give each project special attention and take a hands-on approach. In addition, he said working across the country enables the firm to stay on top of architectural trends and bring them to the Springs.

He said the firm's ability to design high-rise buildings and mixed-use complexes also is a benefit.

"We've deliberately tried to not get too big, and we could have," Comstock said.

The firm is currently redesigning the 500,000-square-foot Citadel Crossing shopping center, which it designed originally, adding to the more than 3 million square feet of retail already in the company portfolio.

Events shown in time zone:  
Mountain Time



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- Increase employer contributions
- Decrease payouts to beneficiaries
- A combination of the above
- None of the above

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*Runners-up: Van Sant Group, YOW Architects P.C.*

## Best Automobile Dealership

### Heuberger Motors

For more than 35 years, Heuberger Motors has been providing Colorado Springs residents with all types of Subaru and Volkswagen vehicles, and this year CSBJ readers voted it the best dealership in the city.

The family owned and operated dealership carries one of the largest new car inventories in southern Colorado at its 1080 Motor City Drive location, and it was named the largest volume Subaru dealership in the United States during 2007 and 2008.

In addition to its new car inventory, Heuberger boasts an extensive used inventory, and customers can browse the vehicle stock on the dealership's Web site or by stopping by in person. The dealership offers financing assistance to help customers afford the car they want.

To help keep vehicles up and running, Heuberger provides a full line of services, including repairs, original equipment manufacturer parts and an assortment of other parts and accessories.

*Runners-up: Red Noland Dealerships, Phil Long Dealerships*

## Best Bar to Entertain Clients

### Ritz Grill

Celebrating its 22nd anniversary this year, Ritz Grill owner Luke Travins says customers at the Ritz know what to expect, and according to CSBJ readers, the Ritz delivers.

Travins said the Ritz has gained notoriety in the business community for its long history in the city and the excellent service patrons receive.

"We really, really stress and train for excellence," he said, noting that even simple cocktail servers receive extensive instruction about how to best serve customers. Travins said every employee is trained in all the liquor lines and choices the bar has to offer.

With a bistro-style menu of pasta, steak, seafood, California-style pizzas, large salads and signature Cajun-style dishes, the Ritz, located at 15 S. Tejon St., serves lunch, dinner and Sunday brunch. After 9 p.m., the bar transforms into a nightclub, with live music to accompany its martinis and cocktails most nights.

*Runners-up: 15C, The Famous*

## Best Business Bank

### Wells Fargo

Wells Fargo's classic stagecoach emblem has come to symbolize the more than 11,000 banking locations nationwide and, according to CSBJ readers, it also symbolizes the best business bank in the Springs.

The company's southern Colorado business banking manager Jim Harris said the award is, pure and simple, a tribute to the business banking team.

He said Colorado Spring's team of more than 25 business banking professionals focuses exclusively on meeting the needs of the business community. Harris also said the team takes a long-term approach to business clients and understands that start-up businesses have much different needs than an established business looking to transition into the next generation.

The team's success, he said, comes from providing the right advice, products and services to each business at the right time.

"We know that happy, engaged bankers make for happy clients who want to do business with us."

*Runners-up: U.S. Bank, Ent Federal Credit Union*

## Best Business Board to Sit On

### The Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce

As the self-proclaimed "Voice of Business" in Colorado Springs, the Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce provides information and resources to the business community. Business

owners might be glad to know that CSBJ readers voted for the chamber as the best business board in the city.

CEO Dave Csintyan said the board, which sets the strategic direction for the chamber, is successful because the members want to participate, act as "change agents" and have a "hand in glove fit" with the paid chamber staff. He said each member wants to be on the board and supports its persona.

"It's a joy to work with them," he said.

The chamber itself focuses on helping small businesses, networking, engaging in military affairs and addressing government issues. Csintyan said the board's job is to provide the staff with overarching guidance and to build a tangible, growing and sustainable operating model.

*Runners-up: Economic Development Corp., Memorial Health Systems*

## Best Business Consulting Firm

### Stockman Kast Ryan and Co.

Since 1995, Stockman Kast Ryan and Co. has operated in the Colorado Springs community, becoming the largest locally owned certified public accounting firm in southern Colorado, and what CSBJ readers consider to be the best business consulting firm.

Each of SKR's 10 partners has more than 19 years of experience, and staff members bring to the table expertise in a variety of industries, including small businesses, high net worth individuals, health care, nonprofit organizations, manufacturing and real estate.

Staff members also receive on-going training to stay on top of industry trends and emerging technology.

CEO David Kast said his company keeps its focus on the clients and takes a genuine interest - one that goes beyond simple business interest - in the individuals and businesses who take advantage of his firm's services.

"I always think that you can learn a lot about your clients just by sitting down with them," Kast said.

*Runners-up: BiggsKofford, Action Coach*

## Best Business to Support a Local Charity

### Ent Federal Credit Union

In addition to its awards in four other categories, CSBJ readers voted that Ent Federal Credit Union's commitment to the community reaches outside business and into philanthropy, and they voted Ent the best business to support a local charity.

According to its Web site, Ent's motto, "People helping people," means extending service to the community beyond simply serving its members.

Jim Moore, Ent's senior vice president of corporate communication, said the company has "tried very hard to be good corporate citizens" by contributing to a number of organizations, including the Pikes Peak United Way.

He said one of Ent's new programs encourages individual employees to volunteer at local charities of their choice, for which the credit union offers recognition of service hours and will even donate small matching grants.

Ent also just wrapped up its Youth Endowment Series, in which local charitable organizations benefiting the region's youth were invited to apply for grants.

*Runners-up: Bristol Brewing Co., Stockman Kast Ryan and Co.*

## Best Casualty Insurance Provider

### USAA

Playing host to a large military community, Colorado Springs businesses serve the men and women of the armed forces, so it comes as no surprise that USAA was voted Best Casualty Insurance Provider.

From its modest beginnings among 25 Army officers who agreed to insure each other's cars during 1922, USAA expanded into a fully integrated financial services company through the following decades, now servicing more than 6.8 million members with over 22,000 employees.

The company offers life insurance, banking, financial planning and property insurance in addition to

its casualty insurance. It owns and manages more than \$119 billion in assets and maintains superior ratings from its three rating agencies.

Membership is restricted to members of the military community and their immediate families, however certain products such as investments, planning and banking are available to the general public.

*Runners-up: Don Bates Insurance, AXA Equitable*

## Best Caterer

### The Picnic Basket

During 1989, driven by a passion for food and adventure, Michelle Talarico and Kathy Dreiling launched The Picnic Basket catering service. Now, almost two decades later, CSBJ readers have once again voted it the best catering service in the Springs.

The Picnic Basket provides full catering services for both businesses and individuals. From box-less lunches to appetizer platters to full buffets, it has a menu selection for just about any regular occasion. Picnic Basket offshoot, Cravings Catering, can fulfill the five-star catering needs of upscale events, while the Buffalo Gals new west BBQ is designed for picnic-style gatherings.

In addition to its food selections, the caterer can provide help with event planning and also provides a variety of other services including liquor offerings, a serving staff, a tableside chef and equipment rental for glassware, silverware, linen, chairs and the like.

*Runners-up: Garden of the Gods Gourmet, In Good Taste, Alpine Chef*

## Best Charity to Support

### Pikes Peak United Way

The Pikes Peak chapter of United Way might be just one of more than 1,300 local organizations that make up the United Way network, but CSBJ readers selected it as the best charity to support.

Since the first United Way campaign raised \$21,700 in Denver during 1888, the charity has expanded on an international scale. Despite its growth, United Way still relies on local chapters to fulfill its mission to "improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities."

To achieve that goal, United Way focuses on promoting education, financial stability and healthy living by partnering with organizations such as the NFL and providing volunteer opportunities in disaster areas like the post-Katrina Gulf Coast.

United Way believes it takes everyone in a community working together to make an impact, and it seeks to unite members of the government, faith, nonprofit and business communities to reach its goals.

*Runners-up: Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region, Care and Share*

## Best Clothier for Men

### Men's Wearhouse

For decades Men's Wearhouse founder and CEO George Zimmer has been guaranteeing customers that they'll "like the way they look." This year, CSBJ readers guarantee it, too.

Men's Wearhouse offers full lines of men's clothing, from suits and sports coats to leather shoes and silk ties to athletic wear and sweaters. The store also offers tuxedos for rent or for purchase.

According to its Web site, Men's Wearhouse is committed to providing quality merchandise and service at everyday prices.

Although there are now three stores in Colorado Springs, the chain's modest beginnings date back to 1973 when Zimmer opened the first Men's Wearhouse in Houston, Texas, with his college roommates, keeping money in a cigar box for lack of a cash register.

By 1994, the clothier was expanding at an average of one store a day throughout the country, and by 1998, revenue exceeded \$1 billion for the first time.

*Runners-up: Rutledge's, William Kurtz Ltd.*

## Best Clothier for Women

## **Kirk and Hill**

According to Jackie Gunn, her staff treats customers as friends, not just clients, and that is what makes Kirk and Hill the best clothier for women.

Gunn, Kirk and Hill's owner, said the store carries clothing styles for "lifestyle dressing" - that is merchandise for everyone, including casual, business casual, business, denim and eveningwear styles.

But it's the personalized customer care, Gunn said, that makes the difference between her store and others, and she said her "outstanding staff" listens to what customers tell them and knows exactly what styles they are looking for.

She said her staff makes what can often be a painful fitting room experience - running back and forth between the room and the clothing racks - pleasant by consulting with and assisting customers in exchanging sizes and even recommending particular items or styles.

Kirk and Hill has two locations in Colorado Springs.

*Runners-up: Drama Boutique, Gloss Denim Bar*

## **Best Colorado Business School**

### **The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs**

The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs might be the little sibling of Boulder's University of Colorado, but CSBJ readers agree that UCCS's business school is no slouch.

As early as the 1920s, CU was offering classes at a number of Colorado Springs locations, but it wasn't until the 1960s that the community began pushing for a full-blown CU presence in the city.

During 1965, residents got their wish when CU bought the defunct Cragmoor Sanitarium property for just \$1 and UCCS was born.

Today, the business program is just one of the 29 bachelor's, 18 master's and four doctoral programs UCCS offers.

Dr. Venkat Reddy, dean of the College of Business, said one of the elements that attracts students to the business program is its variety of innovative programs, some of which are available at only a few universities. Unique programs include Professional Golf Association management and sports management and innovation, a program which combines engineering and business skills.

*Runners-up: CU Boulder, University of Denver*

## **Best Colorado School for an MBA**

### **The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs**

While the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs might be the best school for an MBA in Colorado, Dean of the College of Business Dr. Venkat Reddy said his college is not necessarily focused on winning awards or even on growing successful businessmen and businesswomen.

What it is about, he said, is building successful futures.

Whose futures? Not just futures for students, but successful futures for faculty, staff, the community and local businesses, and that, Reddy said, makes UCCS the best.

Reddy said the school's success stems from the relationships it builds in the community that allow for cooperation in internship opportunities and draw strong faculty members to the college. With 4,000 plus alumni living and working in town, UCCS adds to the economic development of the town and that also helps garner community support.

"Truly, at the end of the day, we've established ourselves as a college that cares about our community and its success," Reddy said.

*Runners-up: Regis University, University of Denver*

## **Best Colorado School for an Online Degree**

### **The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs**

In addition to its excellence in business education, CSBJ readers voted that the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs' online offerings are the best in the state.

The CU offshoot offers select online programs from the College of Nursing and Health Sciences;

Graduate School of Business Administration; College of Education; College of Engineering and Applied Science; College of Letters, Arts and Sciences; School of Public Affairs; and Center for Homeland Security.

Dr. Venkat Reddy, dean of the College of Business, said the online programs are maintained at a very high level. The online MBA program, for example, allows for a maximum of 40 students per class and uses the same faculty as the on-campus programs - something Reddy said allows faculty to cater to students in a more effective way.

Students have five years to complete UCCS's online MBA program, although students who work full time generally complete the program in an average of two and half years.

*Runners-up: University of Phoenix, Colorado Technical University*

## Best Commercial Equipment Rental Company

### Bill's Tool Rental

Although most CSBJ readers will probably never need to use a trencher, floor sander or airless paint sprayer, those who do will be glad to know that Bill's Tool Rental has once again been named the best rental company in the Springs.

Family owned and operated for three generations since 1958, Bill's provides customers with everything from shovels, industrial strength heaters and ground augers to forklifts, scaffolding and laser level tripods.

Vice President Hunter Lewis said the intangible element that makes Bill's the best is a commitment to customer service.

"Without the best people providing the best customer service we're no different than any other rental company," Lewis said.

He said excellent service includes getting customers the equipment they need and utilizing an expert staff that helps people make the right decisions every step of the way.

*Runners-up: United Rentals, AAA Rental*

## Best Commercial Lender

### Ent Federal Credit Union and Wells Fargo

This year CSBJ readers were torn between two of the city's most well-known lenders for the best commercial lender category.

Ent Federal Credit Union, which provides services exclusively from its locations in Colorado, was chartered during 1957 with 30 members and just \$602 dollars in deposits. From its modest beginnings, the company has now grown to be the largest financial institution in the Pikes Peak region.

Wells Fargo, founded by Henry Wells and William Fargo in California during 1892, operates on a national scale, with thousands of locations across American and a sizable number of branches in Colorado.

Wells Fargo's southern Colorado business banking manager, Jim Harris, said the company excels by bringing the vast resources of the bank to its clients through local management and good decision-making and service.

*Runners-up: U.S. Bank, Chase Bank*

## Best Commercial Printer

### Allegra Print and Imaging

Allegra Print and Imaging owner Brad Rhodes might joke that he "has no clue" why his print shop was voted best in the Springs, but CSBJ readers agree that his company is doing something the others don't.

Whether it is Allegra's expertise in digital copying, commercial printing, large format signs, project management or cutting-edge technology that elevates it above the competition, Rhodes said the culture of self-sacrifice that permeates his employees really makes a difference.

"I think we're selfless," he said. "We try to think of the customers first."

Beyond that, Rhodes said employees tend to think of one another's needs above their own whenever they make decisions.

Allegra meets its clients' requests with total solutions and works side by side with them from start to finish. The company also contributes to several nonprofits annually to help strengthen its image and name-recognition in the community.

*Runners-up: Fittje Brothers Printing, Master Craft Press*

## Best Commercial Real Estate Company

### Hoff & Leigh

Some might call it a miracle that Bob Hoff and Tim Leigh survived their first months as partners since Hoff's car had only one working window and a door that was prone to swing open on sharp right turns.

Hoff and Leigh did more than just survive, however. More than two decades later, Hoff & Leigh is one of the most successful real estate companies in the city - and this year's best commercial real estate company.

The firm concentrates in listing commercial properties such as office, retail and industrial spaces.

Hoff & Leigh employs seven professional, full-time brokers who make more customer contacts than any other commercial company in the area and exceed more than \$50 million in annual sales volume.

"We have a better field of knowledge than any of our competitors," President Tim Leigh said.

*Runners-up: Cameron Butcher, Griffis/Blessing, Inc.*

## Best Communications/Telephone System Equipment Provider

### Qwest

Qwest is one of the leading providers of voice, video and data services around the world, and according to CSBJ readers, it is the best provider in the Springs.

The communications company employs about 33,000 people to support and maintain its broadband network, which spans more than 138,000 miles globally and covers every mile of 14 U.S. states.

This network, designed with the latest technology to maintain its speed and efficiency, allows businesses and consumers from all corners of the globe to access new products and services.

Qwest has dedicated itself to expanding its broadband applications, services and geographic capabilities in order to best meet the needs of the businesses, governments and individuals that rely on it for their daily information transactions.

Among the services the company offers are high-speed Internet, cable television, wireless and wired telephone networks, and Voice over IP.

*Runners-up: West-Tech, Comcast*

## Best Community Board to Sit On

### Boys and Girls Club

For more than 120 years, the Boys and Girls Club has been operating in the Pikes Peak region to help develop young people, especially those who come from disadvantaged economic, social and family circumstances. This year it was voted the best community board to sit on.

Executive Director James Sullivan said the board members enjoy working together and keep their attention trained on how to serve the children best.

"We have a real focus," Sullivan said. "It's all about the kids."

He said the board is very opportunistic in its approach to supporting and enriching the kids - 62 percent of whom come from single-parent households - and their families.

The Boys and Girls Club of the Pikes Peak Region is part of a nationwide web of local organizations that work to help young people of all backgrounds develop the skills they need to be responsible citizens and leaders.

*Runners-up: YMCA, Memorial Health System*

## Best Copy/Reproduction Company

### FedEx Office

During the last few years, Kinko's has experienced a few name changes. While the name has changed, the services it offers hasn't, and for yet another year, CSBJ reader voted FedEx Kinko's, now FedEx Office, the best copy/reproduction company in the city.

FedEx purchased all 1,200 Kinko's locations during 2004 and its service network has only expanded since.

The Dallas-based company operates a network of more than 1,900 digitally connected FedEx Office locations. Although the precise services offered vary by location, services include copying and digital printing, professional finishing, document creation, sign and graphic design, computer rental, Internet access and FedEx shipping services.

More than 400 locations are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The company employs about 22,000 people in a service area that includes eight countries.

*Runners-up: Copy It!, Allegra Print & Imaging*

## Best Corporate Financial Services

### Strategic Financial Partners

Strategic Financial Partners is a comprehensive financial services provider headquartered in Colorado Springs.

SFP specializes in providing clients with long-term financial products and services in areas such as business, estate and retirement planning, wealth accumulation programs and protection programs.

For businesses in particular, SFP works with clients to ensure the security of their company by providing life insurance for key people, planning for passing a business from one generation to the next, and creating benefit and reward programs for executives.

The company trademark is "Service that excels," and CEO John Ferguson said service is something his teams of financial professions take seriously when designing their comprehensive financial packages.

"We take an objective approach to see what exactly our clients need and want. Clients feel they're part of the process and we're not forcing our agenda upon them," Ferguson said. "We're not selling a product; we're selling solutions."

*Runners-up: Stockman Kast Ryan and Co., Ent Federal Credit Union*

## Best Credit Union

### Ent Federal Credit Union

If you live, work, worship or attend school in the Springs, CSBJ readers agree that you won't regret becoming a member at Ent Federal Credit Union.

Once again voted the best credit union in the city, the company provides services throughout much of Colorado, and offers people the opportunity to be a member and part owner of the nonprofit co-operative.

Ent's vice president, Jim Moore, said the company attends to its members needs on a specific and individual basis, finding the right products and services to meet the needs of each situation.

"I like to think of it as having kind of a financial tool kit," Moore said.

The National Credit Union Administration federally insures each member's savings up to \$250,000, and members receive the benefits of Ent's net earnings in the form of higher dividends on savings, lower interest rates on loans and lower, or no fees, on services.

*Runners-up: Air Academy Federal Credit Union, Security Service Federal Credit Union*

## Best Cultural Attraction to Support

### Fine Arts Center

For the fourth consecutive year, CSBJ readers selected the Fine Arts Center as the best cultural attraction to support.

Located downtown near Colorado College, the FAC hosts an array of attractions, including the Taylor Museum, Bemis School of Art and a theater for live performing arts.

According to Director of Communications Charlie Snyder, it is this variety that makes the Fine Arts Center attractive to the Springs' residents because they can visit and experience live performances, a diversity of art exhibits and even art education classes that cater to everyone from children to senior citizens.

Snyder said visitors' ability to gather their family and take them to an institution with world-class exhibits right here in town makes the center popular.

New, expanded art galleries offer a greater variety of art exhibitions, and the theatre hosts live performances year round and summer workshops for youth.

*Runners-up: Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Garden of the Gods*

## Best Custom Home Builder

### Keller Homes

With its commitment to building better new homes in Colorado Springs, Keller Homes was voted the best custom home builder by CSBJ readers.

Working in seven neighborhoods throughout the city, Keller specializes in building new homes ranging in price from the high \$200,000s to the \$800,000s. Floor plans range from the high 2,000-square-foot range to the mid-5,000-square-foot range.

In every price range, the builder is committed to achieving quality, avoiding mistakes and utilizing the best resources available, all while keeping its prices reasonable.

Keller Homes pays particular attention to its homes space design, individual details and engineering, and while, according to its Web site, the builder does not follow just any design fad, it does offer innovations that its competitors do not.

Some of these innovations include three-car tandem garages that keep the street view intact and four-sided architecture designed to make every side of the home appealing.

*Runners-up: Classic Homes, Nichols & Comito*

## Best Developer

### La Plata Communities

Encompassing more than 9,600 acres, the Briargate area has become one of the fastest-growing and most livable communities in northeastern Colorado Springs under the guiding hand of La Plata Communities.

Voted the best developer in the city by CSBJ readers, La Plata has been Briargate's master developer and the architect behind the development and expansion of the Briargate and Pine Creek communities since 1995.

La Plata's newest community development project, Cordera, represents the third residential phase of the Briargate project build-out, and on the company Web site, CEO Scott Smith said the developer has used its past community building experience to create the best community possible.

Cordera's homes start in the \$300,000 range. The community features Colorado Springs's premier homebuilders, miles of walking, running and biking trails, storybook themed children's parks, pedestrian underpasses, cul-de-sac streets, and a community center with a fitness area and heated pool.

*Runners-up: Norwood Development Group, Classic Homes*

## Best Dry Cleaners

### Continental Cleaners

From its two locations in the Springs, independently owned and operated Continental Cleaners serves the dry cleaning and laundry needs of the area.

Continental follows a low-price, high-volume concept that was pioneered by cleaners in southern California during the 1960s, when customers could get their garments dry-cleaned for just 39 cents.

Although costs have certainly risen during the decades since, Continental still keeps its prices low - just \$1.70 for dry-cleaning at its 1043 N. Academy Blvd. location and \$1.60 at its 1630 S. Nevada Ave. location. Continental also will perform laundry services.

The cleaner established itself in Colorado during 1983 and now offers services at 17 locations throughout the state. Every store uses state-of-the-art cleaning equipment that meets or exceeds all OSHA and EPA requirements.

Both Springs locations are open Monday through Saturday.

*Runners-up: Summit Cleaners, Pressed4Time*

## Best Electrical Contractor

### West Electric Group

Most business owners would probably agree that lights are a vital part of their day-to-day operations, and West Electric Group is happy to provide them.

Since 1984, West Electric has been providing electrical contracting work to businesses in Colorado. After expanding to Colorado Springs during 1993, the contractor has grown to employ more than 200 field workers and 30 office support personnel.

The company's area of expertise extends far beyond light wiring. West Electric provides services to government, health care, correctional/judicial, advanced technology and resort facilities for the entire state. It recently completed projects at the Air Force Academy, numerous local schools and remodels for the Fine Arts Center and the Rocky Mountain Wild exhibit at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, to name a few.

According to Marketing Director Claire Landis-Tyson, "West Electric Group provides exceptional expertise, the highest caliber of service, and passionate, hard-working men and women dedicated to producing excellent results."

*Runners-up: Foster Electric Corp., Whitney Electric*

## Best Engineering Firm

### J.R. Engineering

During 1973, surveyor Jim Fraker and engineer Roger Guertner tossed a coin into the air and upon its landing, J.R. Engineering was born.

From the coin-toss to determine the order of the company initiates - J.R. instead of R.J. - the company of four employees grew to 120 by 1985.

When the oil bust and economic recession of the late 1980s forced many similar firms out of business, J.R. Engineering stuck it out and even expanded to Colorado Springs, where it engineered and subdivided areas such as Briargate and Northgate.

Today, the firm provides civil engineering services for residential, commercial, industrial and educational sectors. It provides assistance from the early stages of land acquisition all the way through construction.

J.R. Engineering maintains teams that specialize in surface transportation, water resources, structural engineering, construction and surveying. Its portfolio includes projects for the Colorado Department of Transportation, Lowe Enterprises, and local residential communities.

*Runners-up: Matrix Design Group Inc., Colorado Engineering Inc.*

## Best Executive Office Suites

### Strategic Financial Partners

Having the best executive office suites in the city might not be Strategic Financial Partners' primary business goal, but CEO John Ferguson said the atmosphere it creates helps clients feel at ease.

Ferguson said he frequently has people tell him that SFP's office is the best they have ever seen, and he said the office is both comfortable and highly professional.

"It shows (people) that we take a first class approach on all levels with our clients," he said. "It starts with our physical facility."

The comprehensive financial services firm is located on the fifth floor of the Briargate Office Center, at the northeast corner of Highway 83 and Research Parkway.

*Runners-up: Plaza of the Rockies, Intelligent Office, Office Solution*

## Best Executive Search Firm

### Add Staff Inc.

Any business is only as good as its executive staff, and Add Staff Inc. is dedicated to matching successful businesses and executive candidates in the Pikes Peak region.

According to President Cari Shafer, "teaming" is a simple, but powerful, idea and various organizations have been teaming with Add Staff since 1992 to do what the company does best: "add staff."

She said her company spends a good deal of time identifying success factors in candidates and said the search firm's commitment to excellence for both businesses and candidates is unparalleled in the community.

It's little wonder then, that Shaffer said Add Staff's success stems from its highly qualified and highly professional in-house staffers, who, among the 16 of them, have more than 210 years of recruiting experience. Nine staff members have worked together for over a decade.

"Our highly experienced team demonstrates daily their dedication to solving recruiting challenges," Shafer said.

*Runners-up: AccountAbilities, Robert Half & Associates*

## Best Fleet Dealership

### Phil Long

Phil Long's commercial vehicle department provides an assortment of vans, trucks and SUVs to businesses that need a vehicle fleet to get their job done right.

Some of Phil Long's clients include plumbing, painting, heating and construction companies and even government agencies. The City of Colorado Springs, for example, has signed a five-year strategic alliance with the dealership.

Clients interested in starting a fleet can get special financing options that are tailor made for businesses, and they can order vehicles from a selection of any number of body styles, size options and specialized features.

Phil Long also employs factory-trained technicians who know its fleet vehicles inside and out, and it uses factory recommended and approved OEM parts for all its repairs to keep vehicles running smoothly no matter what their purpose is.

*Runners-up: Daniels Chevrolet, Liberty Toyota*

## Best Florist

### Skyway Creations Flower Shop and Greenery

The family owned and operated Skyway Creations has been delivering fresh flowers to customers all over Colorado Springs since 1965.

Operating from its single location at 1407 S. 8th St., owner Don Goede said his store keeps an emphasis on delivering fresh products and said fresh flowers arrive weekly from both the California and Florida coasts.

Customers can order flowers - which Goede guarantees will be delivered on the same day - by phone, online or a visit to the store, after which Skyway's "quality designers" will craft each floral creation into the desired arrangement.

Goede said the designers are always trying to learn something new, stay up on the latest design trends and make sure they don't get stuck in their ways.

"We like to think we're pretty hip," he said.

Skyway Creations is open Monday through Saturday and specializes in arrangements for all occasions, including weddings, funerals and holidays.

*Runners-up: Platte Floral, Rich Designs*

## Best General Contractor

### G.E. Johnson

G.E. Johnson construction company is not just about building buildings; it's about building

relationships with customers and project partners, building the very communities its employees live in and building opportunities for those who seek to succeed in construction careers.

And, beyond that, it has built itself a healthy reputation in Colorado Springs.

Since 1967, G.E. Johnson has been building buildings and relationships in the city and state, completing projects in just about every commercial sector including health care, education, judicial/correctional, resort and advanced technology.

About 85 percent of G.E. Johnson's work is for existing customers, demonstrating a commitment to service that builds relationships and retains clients.

The company has completed more than \$3 billion in projects, ranging from \$10,000 to \$130 million. Some examples of its work include Cheyenne Mountain Jr. High, the El Paso County Judicial Building and office buildings in the Briargate Business Campus.

*Runners-up: Hammers Constructions Inc., Buffalo Builders Inc.*

## Best Gym/Exercise Facility

### YMCA

As one of the largest nonprofit community service organizations in the United States, the YMCA serves thousands of communities and was voted the best exercise facility in the city.

The nine YMCA locations in Colorado Springs make up just a fraction of the organization's 2,686 locations across the country, and all these locations serve almost 21 million adults and children of every race, age, income, faith and background.

The YMCA hopes to help these individuals strengthen their spiritual, mental and physical well-being, while helping families build stronger bonds and instilling positive values in children and youth.

Although specific services vary by location, each YMCA aims to improve its community's health by offering a variety of exercise facilities such as weight rooms and swimming pools, group fitness classes such as yoga and cycling, and child development initiatives such as summer camps and daycare programs.

*Runners-up: 24 Hour Fitness, Gold's Gym*

## Best Health Care Insurance Provider

### Humana

For any business, extending health care benefits to employees can be a daunting and expensive task, but Humana aims to help.

According to its Web site, Humana is "committed to helping employers manage their health care costs, guiding consumers to make informed health and benefit decisions and giving back to the communities" it serves.

From employee-sponsored group plans that cover active employees, to customizable health, dental and life insurance for individuals and their families, Humana can provide services to any size business, whether it is just one person or thousands.

Additionally, Humana offers a variety of specialty benefits that provide extended coverage in areas such as accident insurance, critical illness insurance and vision care.

To supplement its products and fulfill the last part of its commitment, associates at each Humana location partner with local civic, cultural and community organizations to meet the needs of its public.

*Runners-up: Kaiser Permanente, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield*

## Best Hospital

### Penrose-St. Francis Health Services

Not too long ago, a cancer patient at Penrose-St. Francis finished eight weeks of grueling treatment and beat his disease. Despite the joy that stemmed from his victory, COO Jamie Smith said the man showed a twinge of sadness as he prepared to walk out the hospital doors for the last time.

"I'm going to miss coming to Penrose," Smith said the man said.

And that, Smith said, is what makes his health system the best in the city.

Last year, more than 20,000 people were admitted into the Penrose-St. Francis Health System, not

including the almost 90,000 who made trips to the emergency room. Nearly 800 physicians staff the health system.

Smith said the culture of caring and individual attention that permeates the Penrose-St. Francis care facilities helps patients enjoy their experience as much as possible.

"It's the people who take care of you that make a difference," he said.

*Runners-up: Memorial Health System, St. Mary Corwin*

## Best Insurance Broker

### Strategic Financial Partners

Questions like "who will run my business if I die or become disabled" might not be the easiest nor the most pleasant for business owners to answer, but Strategic Financial Partners is there to help.

The comprehensive financial services firm offers a variety of insurance planning options and services to help ensure its clients' businesses are protected against things both foreseen and unexpected.

For example, the Key Person Life Insurance Plan, which covers employees whose sudden, unexpected absence would significantly impact a business, can provide the money a business needs to continue in the event that a critical employee is lost due to death or turnover.

Despite the popularity of the services SFP offers, CEO John Ferguson said the firm's relationship with its clients is what helps his business grow.

"Our clients are very satisfied, and they tell their friends, and (their friends) have an elevated level of trust," he said.

*Runners-up: Six & Geving, C.B. Insurance*

## Best IT Consulting/Training Company

### Amnet

These days, even the smallest of businesses cannot operate without a computer network, and CSBJ readers agree that Amnet is the best company to make sure your network stays up and running.

Amnet specializes in helping the Front Range's small- and medium-sized businesses design, install, maintain and improve their computer networks. It also provides emergency network service to companies with 10 to 250 computers.

CEO Trevor Dierdorff said his company's emergency response times and client retention make it the best in the city.

Amnet guarantees a response to network crashes within two hours, and Dierdorff said Amnet's remote monitoring system means that its staff often knows about a network problem before the client.

The company employs 12 people, making it the largest networks solutions company in town.

"We haven't gotten to be the biggest by trying to be the biggest," Dierdorff said. "We've gotten there by trying to be the best."

*Runners-up: Advanced Business Solutions Inc., Navakai*

## Best Janitorial Service

### Stratus Building Solutions

Stratus Building Solutions has more than 20 years of commercial cleaning experience and franchises in more than 20 states, including three in Colorado.

The cleaning company provides services for commercial buildings, retail properties, medical facilities, schools and more.

Employees are part of a professionally trained, uniformed cleaning team and are presided over by local franchise owner/operators whose businesses depend of customer satisfaction.

While each franchise is locally owned and operated, Stratus is a nationally operated company and is backed by an experienced management team. This particular model allows the company to benefit from local, individual market opportunities while maintaining the backing of a nationally recognized brand and a proven operating system.

According to its Web site, Stratus understands the importance of exceeding the expectations of its

clients by providing efficient, affordable and personalized service.

The cleaning company is a member of the U.S. Green Building Council and is a Green Certified business.

*Runners-up: Jan Pro, Environment Control*

## Best Jeweler

### Johannes Hunter

High-end jewelers might seem stuffy and intimidating, but Robin Johannes, owner of Johannes Hunter Jewelers, said customers frequently tell her that her company is "far more lighthearted than it appears from the outside" and is "unexpectedly witty."

This human touch and the staff's straight-up approach to business, she said, is part of what makes her company successful.

"People love our staff," Johannes said.

The business is family owned and operated, which is another element that Johannes said helps the company's success, because customers like knowing they can come into the store and speak directly to an owner.

Johannes Hunter carries only high-quality merchandise, and all diamonds, colored gemstones and jewelry are hand selected by gemologists. The store carries an extensive selection of classic and custom merchandise such as bridal and engagement rings, earrings, pendants and more.

The jeweler is located at 124 N. Tejon St. and is open Monday through Saturday.

*Runners-up: Zerbe Jewelers, Luisa Graff Jewelers*

## Best Large Company with the Most Promising Future

### Ent Federal Credit Union

Amid the economic downturn that continues to impact businesses and customers across the nation, Ent Federal Credit Union has experienced growth.

Vice President Jim Moore said people, including CSBJ readers, see that Ent's conservative capital management philosophy has resulted in a "very good capital situation" for the credit union and are willing to put their trust in the company as a result.

"We're in pretty good shape moving forward," he said.

The company has worked "very hard" during the last decade or so to establish a sound financial platform and foundation, Moore said, and Ent has "good, quality folks" working throughout the organization to meet the growing needs of its member base.

The credit union is the largest financial institution in the Pikes Peak region, with nearly 200,000 members. It has more than 25 service centers and more than 50 local, surcharge-free ATM's.

*Runners-up: USAA, BiggsKofford*

## Best Law Firm

### Mulliken Weiner Karsh Berg & Jolivet P.C.

With its extensive experience in the areas of business and commercial litigation, CSBJ readers voted Mulliken Weiner Karsh Berg & Jolivet the best law firm.

Since 1991, the firm has been serving the Spring's business community with expertise in commercial transactions, litigation, business planning, choice of entity, real estate, land use, construction, employment, gaming, federal taxation, asset protection planning, trusts and estates.

The firm is committed to providing those legal services in a prompt, efficient and high-quality manner.

"I think what sets us apart is the attorneys' complete dedication to their clients in terms of providing the highest quality legal services and providing them at a fair price," partner Karl Berg said.

The Mulliken Weiner Karsh Berg & Jolivet law offices are located in the Alamo Corporate Center at 102 S. Tejon St., Suite 900.

*Runners-up: Sparks Willson Borges Brandt & Johnson P.C., Holland & Hart LLP*

## Best Life Insurance Provider

### American Family

During October 1927, insurance salesman Herman Wittwer created Farmers Mutual Insurance Co. in Madison, Wis. The company sold only automobile insurance, targeting the farming community in particular, because Wittwer believed farmers were lower risk drivers than city folk.

Since its beginnings with three employees and 346 charter member policy holders, the company has grown to offer multiple insurance and financial product lines in 19 states. During 1963, it changed its name to American Family Mutual Insurance Co. to better represent its expanding customer base.

Today American Family offers auto, home, health, business, farm and ranch and, of course, life insurance - including term, universal and whole life policies.

During the 2008 fiscal year, American Family managed about \$15.5 billion in assets, posted more than \$6.7 million in revenue and had \$84 billion of life insurance in force.

*Runners-up: Strategic Financial Partners, AXA Equitable*

## Best Liquor Store

### Cheers Liquor Mart

With more than 35,000 square feet of space packed with liquor of all shapes, sizes and flavors, Cheers Liquor Mart has become something of a landmark in the Colorado Springs area.

Cheers is the largest liquor store in southern Colorado, and with such massive floor space, it goes without saying that the store carries one of the best selections of beer, wine and spirits in the nation.

In addition to its wide selection of alcohol, Cheers also supplies customers with a variety of soda's and juices and carries an extensive stock of cigarettes.

The liquor mart does not get by purely on its inventory, however, and according to its Web site, Cheers' success during the last 25 years stems from the individual attention given to each customer by the knowledgeable and friendly staff.

Cheers is located at 1105 N. Circle Drive and is open every day of the week.

*Runners-up: Coaltrain Wine & Liquor, Colorado Liquor Outlet*

## Best Local Ad Campaign

### Cheyenne Mountain Zoo

Cheyenne Mountain Zoo approached advertising the latest addition to its holdings with a different view: a look at animals from the Rocky Mountain region that at one time had been seriously threatened.

Called "Rocky Mountain Wild," the campaign - orchestrated by Vladimir Jones - invited people to explore the new section of the zoo which is focused on those rare animals from the region. Photos of bears, moose and mountain lions urged people to come to the zoo to see the wild animals.

"It was different from our normal, lighthearted campaign," said Sean Anglum, public relations and special events manager for the zoo. "And we could tell it worked from the numbers at the gate."

The zoo focused on its mission during the campaign: bringing people to the zoo to connect with the wild and the wilderness, he said.

*Runners-up: Ent Federal Credit Union (Freedom Is), Kaiser Permanente (Thrive), St. Francis Medical Center (H)*

## Best Local CEO

### Phil Kiemel

For the first time, Phil Kiemel has been chosen as best local CEO.

Although he prefers to remain out of the spotlight, Kiemel has held the reins of his family's company, Bestway Disposal, for several years - becoming the fourth generation to oversee the waste disposal company.

As CEO, he oversees 50 Department of Transportation certified drivers, 12 customer service staff

members, seven full-time mechanics and 15 additional support staff.

Kiemel's company offers a 100 percent service guarantee, and single-stream recycling with 10,000 residential customers.

The company also is heavily involved in the community - sponsoring local events and providing financial support for charity events.

*Runners-up: Chris Blees, Charles Emmer*

## Best Local Company Web Site

### Bestway Disposal

Bestway Disposal's Web site is extremely user friendly - and that's probably why CSBJ readers voted it "best" among business Web sites.

With a focus on customer service - you can sign up for service, move services and find out about the company's extensive recycling program. Customers also can see the full range of services offered.

Bestway Disposal recently started a Twitter feed so that customers can find out what community events the company sponsors and what else the company is involved with.

Visit [www.bestway.com](http://www.bestway.com) to find out why Bestway was rated No. 1.

*Runners-up: Stockman Kast Ryan and Co., BiggsKofford*

## Best Local Delivery Service

### Trip Savers

For the past three years, Trip Savers has been selected as the "best local delivery service" by CSBJ readers.

The company offers same-day and next-day local delivery in Colorado Springs and the central Front Range - from Pueblo to Fort Collins.

With 15 full-time drivers, Trip Savers can handle interoffice mail, court filings, legal, medical and lab deliveries. The company also can handle special express local delivery requirements like standing in line to process a deposit or form.

*Runners-up: Rap Express, UPS*

## Best Local Golf Tournament

### HBA

The annual Housing and Building Association of Colorado Springs golf tournament can be summed up in one word: fun.

The largest fund raiser for the group's political action committee, the golf tournament is held the first Monday in June at Kissing Camels.

And not even the recession could keep the fun away: This year, 148 golfers teed up for the annual event.

*Runners-up: Chamber of Commerce golf tournament, Economic Development Corp.'s Tournament of Teams*

## Best Local Internet Provider

### Comcast

Comcast was founded during 1963 as a single-system cable operation. Today, the company is the nation's largest provider of cable services - and one of the world's leading communication companies.

Comcast's broadband Internet system routinely ranks as the best by CSBJ readers - known for its high speed and effortless connection to e-mail, music, photos, weather and more.

*Runners-up: Qwest, Data 102*

## Best Local School District

### Academy District 20

Academy District 20's history goes back to the time of log schoolhouses on the western frontier.

The district existed for more than 20 years with one high school, one junior high and a handful of elementary schools. The decade of the 1980s brought the district's major building boom, with the addition of two high schools, two middle schools and six elementary schools.

Currently, Academy District 20 consists of five high schools, five middle schools and 18 elementary schools utilizing a K-5, 6-8, 9-12 grade level configuration. District 20 also has one charter school.

*Runners-up: Colorado Springs School District 11, Cheyenne Mountain School District 12*

## Best Local Sporting Event to Take a Client

### Sky Sox baseball

The Colorado Springs Sky Sox are the Triple-A affiliate of the Colorado Rockies.

The Sky Sox are a member of the Pacific Coast League, and the franchise was based in Sacramento and Honolulu before finding a home in Colorado Springs.

During 1988, the team's owners built a \$3.7 million ballpark on the eastern edge of Colorado Springs - it is now the highest-elevation professional ballpark in the United States at 6,531 feet above sea level.

Known as Security Service Field, the stadium has a capacity of 8,500.

The Sky Sox have won two PCL titles, during 1992 and 1995.

*Runners-up: Colorado College Tigers hockey, Air Force Academy Falcons football*

## Best Mechanical Contractor

### Olson Plumbing and Heating

Started during 1917, Olson Plumbing and Heating operates 24 hours a day to serve homes and offices in the Colorado Springs region.

The company specializes in new air conditioners, as well as emergency plumbing repairs, new heating systems and complete HVAC systems for commercial properties. Olson uses radio-dispatched technicians to take care of emergencies - any time, day or night.

In addition to being voted "best mechanical contractor" by CSBJ readers, the company also won the VISTA Award from the American Society of Health Care Engineering for its work on surgical suites at Penrose-St. Francis Health Centers.

*Runners-up: Heating and Plumbing Engineers, Friend Climate Control*

## Best Metro Business Leader

### Jerry Biggs

From relatively modest beginnings in a small town in the San Luis Valley, Jerry Biggs grew BiggsKofford into one of the largest locally owned accounting firms, serving more than 600 clients.

Along the way, he has worked as a management consultant and CPA for companies in the construction, gaming, hospitality, retail, manufacturing and agriculture industries.

He was appointed to serve as a commissioner on the Colorado Economic Development Commission, and has served as chairman of the Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce.

Biggs was a runner-up for this award during 2004, and has received other accolades: the 2001 Small Business Person of the Year for Colorado Springs and a 2002 public service award from the Colorado Society of Certified Public Accountants.

*Runners up: Tom Naughton, Jim Johnson*

## Best Minority Business Leader

### Eric Drummond

Eric Drummond came to Manitou Springs five years ago, a refugee from the hustle and bustle of Austin, Texas.

For more than four years he was an attorney in private practice, working from a home-based office, and representing clients in the energy, utilities and telecommunications industries. During March of this year, he joined Sherman & Howard, where he will work closely with that firm's alternative energy practice.

Elected mayor of Manitou during 2007, Drummond participates in the governor's initiatives to implement sustainable energy strategies. He has led efforts to measure the city's carbon footprint and to define and implement a greenhouse gas emissions reduction program.

He's a member of the Energy Issues Committee of the Colorado Municipal League and the Green Cities Coalition of the Pikes Peak region.

*Runners-up: James Sullivan, Lionel Rivera*

## Best Mortgage Company

### Ent Federal Credit Union

Ent Federal Credit Union was originally created for the benefit of the employees and service members who worked at Ent Air Force Base, once located where the Olympic Training Center now stands.

Today, membership in the credit union is open to any resident of the Pikes Peak region. From its modest beginnings, Ent has grown to have nearly 200,000 members and assets of \$2.6 billion. Ent attributes its success to its member-friendly and service-oriented philosophy.

"While banks have customers, credit unions have members," the credit union notes on its Web site. "At Ent, you are one of the owners of a not-for-profit financial cooperative. We pass our net earnings back to our members in the form of higher dividends on savings, lower rates on loans, and lower fees (or no fees) for services."

*Runners-up: CB&T Mortgage, Wells Fargo*

## Best Networking Event/Group

### Colorado Springs Young Professionals

Four years ago, Jon Severson founded CSYP "to cultivate the social environment that young professionals thrive in," and to help create a positive business environment for young professionals.

Severson is proud that the organization he created "in my spare time" has more than 1,300 members, making it the largest such group in the state. Severson's goal is to ensure that Colorado Springs is an attractive city for young professionals.

To that end, CSYP sponsors socials from 6 to 8 p.m. on the second and fourth Thursdays of every month. CSYP also coordinates multiple events such as mountain bike rides, hikes, book clubs and ski trips.

CSYP, Severson said, is both an entry point and an ongoing resource for young professionals, fostering an environment that has led many young professionals to call Colorado Springs their home.

*Runners-up: Strictly Business, Colorado Springs Executive Association*

## Best New Commercial Development

### North Nevada corridor

After more than five years of planning, designing and construction, the University Village retail center, the centerpiece of a revitalized North Nevada corridor, will have its grand opening during October.

Costco will open a store there, along with Noodles & Co., Panera Bread and Chipotle Mexican Grill. Kohl's and Lowe's are scheduled to open next spring, and other businesses are expected to follow.

The development, initially criticized as being a collection of big boxes better suited to a suburban setting than to its location near the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, will be notably bike and pedestrian friendly, featuring a broad underpass beneath a reconstructed Nevada Avenue, which will allow students easy access to stores and restaurants.

Kratt Commercial Properties is the developer.

*Runner-up: Briargate Crossing*

## Best New Home Development

### Flying Horse

Flying Horse, a master-planned luxury home community, is located off Highway 83 and Flying Horse Club Drive.

The development boasts spectacular views of the Front Range, extraordinary recreational facilities, an imaginatively conceived K-12 academic campus operated by School District 20 and an exclusive championship golf course designed by Tom Weiskopf.

Flying Horse was conceived by Classic Cos., one of the leading local developer/homebuilders in the Pike Peak region.

In common with most luxury home communities, Flying Horse has felt the effects of the recession, but is clearly well-positioned to weather any downturn. On citydata.com, where user posts can be devastatingly negative, Flying Horse received nothing but positive comments.

One poster wrote: "I would live up there in a heartbeat if I didn't already own a house ... The view of the mountains is absolutely gorgeous ... The area looks good, the views are fantastic and it's a good location for working both in Colorado Springs or Denver."

*Runners-up: Cordera, Banning-Lewis Ranch*

## Best Nonprofit Event

### Heart Ball

More than 25 years ago, Paulette Greenberg brought the idea of having a Heart Ball in Colorado Springs to the board of directors of the Heart Association. That initial event drew just 69 attendees, and barely broke even.

A quarter of a century later, the Heart Ball has evolved into the city's premier nonprofit charity event, featuring both silent and live auctions, an elegant dinner and an opportunity to dance the night away.

Last year, the event's silver anniversary ball, was held at the Broadmoor International Center, and raised more than \$275,000 for the Heart Association. During 2009, the ball moved to the Cheyenne Mountain Resort, where 384 guests defied the recession and helped raise more than \$150,000, bringing the 26-year total to nearly \$3 million.

*Runners-up: Humane Society Furr Ball, Susan G. Komen for the Cure*

## Best Nonprofit Organization

### Care and Share

Care and Share Food Bank is a southern Colorado-based food bank affiliated with America's Second Harvest national network of food banks.

Through a comprehensive food acquisition system, Care and Share acts as region's sole food bank for locally and nationally donated and purchased food.

Last year, Care and Share distributed 11.3 million pounds of food to 99,000 people.

Care and Share notes on its Web site that "The 'faces of hunger' across southern Colorado have changed significantly over the last few years. People who need your help are likely to be working families with children, who must choose between paying for food, or paying for utilities and medical care."

*Runners-up: Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region, Junior League*

## Best Photography Service

### Blue Fox Photography

Wendy Pearce Nelson founded Blue Fox Photography more than 20 years ago, and has been the official photographer for "more events than anyone could ever remember."

Her Web site doesn't bother with the company's history, or with her biography - it's loaded with photographs, testimonials, and brief personal snippets, such as "Can't cook - thank God her husband can!"

Nelson's knack for capturing the essence of a person (or, for that matter, a dog) on film has brought

her recognition, awards and, perhaps best of all, returning clients. As David Bolser wrote on Blue Fox's Web site:

"I have had the pleasure of working with Wendy on an executive session for my business and with a portrait session for the local band 15C. Wendy is a consummate professional as well as an absolute delight to work with. She is creative, unique and, most importantly, has an uncanny ability to work with her clients to capture exactly what they desire. Nobody has to tell you that her work is superior to anything you've seen. Just look at it. You'll know."

*Runners-up: Personality Portraits, Waldron's Photography*

## Best Place for a Business Conference

### Cheyenne Mountain Resort

Cheyenne Mountain Resort's conference center features more than 40,000 square feet of meeting rooms and exhibit space, supported by advanced audio-visual systems.

The facility includes 38 meeting rooms, including a tiered amphitheater and a combination of large and small meeting rooms and conference suites which can accommodate groups from 10 to 600.

Understanding the real impact of day-long meetings, the resort's "eight-hour" chairs were specially designed to provide "the most comfortable and functional seating available in the meeting business."

Conference attendees also appreciate the resort's many amenities, which include championship golf, children's programs, four swimming pools, indoor and outdoor tennis, a complete fitness center, and a 35-acre lake for sailing and fishing.

*Runners-up: The Broadmoor Hotel, the Antlers Hilton*

## Best Place to Buy Promotional Items

### The Doodler

The Doodler, established during 1977, specializes in promotional products and apparel and is Colorado Springs oldest screen printing company.

The company provides multiple lines of specialty items, from customized coffee mugs to appropriately garish golfing apparel. Its products are used as gifts, awards, incentives and prizes to promote every kind of business and nonprofit group.

The company's in-house capabilities allow it to provide custom embroidery and screen printing on T-shirts, polos, bags, hats, jackets and or any other corporate apparel. As the company's cheerful Web site says, "We're your one stop shop for your logo on anything!"

*Runners-up: L.J. Promotional Products, Bing Promotional Products*

## Best Place to Buy Wine

### Coaltrain Wine and Spirits

CSBJ readers have consistently named Coaltrain Liquor as their favorite place to buy a merlot, Riesling, Shiraz or even a tasty port. This marks the fifth consecutive year that the 4,500-square-foot store on Uintah Street near Interstate 25 has taken top honors.

Opened during 1981 by Jim Little and Peggy McKinlay, the popular wine and liquor shop has built its reputation as a go-to center for oenophiles.

During the past year, the company's worldwide wine selection has expanded to include more South African, South American and Spanish wines. Product education always has been a high priority for its owners. When sales of domestic Chardonnay peaked, for example, the store's expert staff was able to introduce its customers to other options such as Spanish Albarino, German Rieslings or an Oregon Pinot Gris.

"We truly invest in the best people available who can help our customers pick the right wine for any occasion," McKinlay said.

The business averages several wine tastings or sold-out dinners at area restaurants per month which are focused on a particular area of the world or grape.

For the wine aficionado interested in experimenting with specialty beers, Coaltrain is planning to expand its beer offerings as well - a potential growth area for the business.

*Runners-up: Cheers Liquor Mart, Vintages Wine and Spirits*

## Best Place to Pick up Coffee

### Starbucks

Despite a recession that has brought some daily latte lovers to their knees, Starbucks continues to capture top honors as the Pikes Peak region's favorite place to savor a cup of coffee.

Whether it's an espresso, a skinny latte, hot chai, iced coffee or a tall house blend teamed with banana bread or coffee cake, the Starbucks name and reputation for consistency and quality keeps it atop a lengthy list of local vendors and other chains.

During the past year, the company implemented several of its own "stimulus" specials to keep loyal customers, including a \$1 cup of Joe.

Through its joint venture partnerships, Starbucks also offers products such as a bottled Frappuccino and a full range of premium Tazo teas, produced by its wholly owned subsidiary.

The Seattle-based international company was founded during 1971 and has grown to more than 10,000 company-owned and licensed locations throughout the United States and Canada.

But its mega-size doesn't seem to deter local traffic at two downtown Colorado Springs stores or at another 18 suburban locations - in addition to a plethora of in-store outlets at King Soopers, Super Target and Safeway.

*Runners-up: Pikes Perk, Dutch Bros.*

## Best Place to Purchase Office Furniture

### OfficeScapes

Whether it's an ergonomic desk chair, an entire floor of cubicles and office suites, or furnishings for a K-12 school, OfficeScapes delivers a long list of furniture and interior products and services.

Described by Southern Colorado President Peter Husak as a "one stop shop," the Colorado Springs office focuses on commercial, government and school furniture, flooring, structured cabling and audiovisual products.

Even during a challenging economic year, the company is expected to generate close to \$16 million in sales - on par with last year.

OfficeScapes employs 38 people and serves a broad swath of southern Colorado, as well as the Western Slope and areas south of Interstate 70 outside Denver's five counties. One of its current projects is the \$1 million outfitting of a renovated Rocky Mountain YMCA in Estes Park.

The company also has been actively involved in furnishing new facilities at Fort Carson and area Air Force bases.

"Between the government and K-12, it's been great," Husak said, adding that his sales force is working to broaden the company's market share beyond core business in Colorado Springs and Pueblo.

*Runners-up: American Furniture Warehouse, Office Depot*

## Best Place to Purchase Office Supplies

### Office Depot

Office Depot proved to be CSBJ readers' favorite office supplier for a third consecutive year.

Founded during 1986, the Delray Beach, Fla.-based company operates 1,160 stores in its North American Retail Division. Four of those are in Colorado Springs, and a fifth is under construction near the intersection of North Academy Boulevard and Austin Bluffs Parkway.

Company officials cited "macroeconomic" or recessionary factors as the reason for lower overall sales during the first quarter of 2009 - off as much as 16 percent on a year-over-year basis. Items hardest hit were furniture and computers.

At the same time, the international retailer's North American Retail Division closed unprofitable stores and reduced expenses in order to maintain an operating profit of about \$81 million.

Office Depot sells to customers in more than 40 countries, throughout North America, Europe, Asia and Latin America, either through wholly owned entities, majority entities or other ventures. Its international division sells office products and services through direct mail catalogs, contract sales forces, Internet sites and retail stores.

*Runners-up: Office Max, Staples*

## Best Place to Work

### Stockman Kast Ryan and Co.

Stockman Kast Ryan and Co. employees no doubt consider themselves lucky: they're employed at the city's best place to work, according to CSBJ readers.

Those polled might have been impressed by the firm's flex-time policies and the founder's dedication to life-work balance. CPA firms have not traditionally offered flex time, said Partner Brenda Lammers, "but we respect our peoples' professional abilities, and an 8-to-5 schedule doesn't always allow our people to work most effectively. We're very happy with the result, and over time, as a company, we've become closer on a personal level."

With about 50 full-time employees, Stockman Kast Ryan is the largest locally-owned certified public accounting firm in southern Colorado. It provides clients with tax, audit and consulting services. SKR also is affiliated with DFK International/USA, which enables it to share technical expertise and to connect clients with services on a national and international level.

Founded during June 1995, the firm's 10 partners have more than 15 years of public accounting experience, providing them with significant expertise in a wide variety of industries - from small businesses and high-net-worth individuals to health care and nonprofit organizations to manufacturing and real estate.

*Runners-up: Heuberger Motors, Bestway Disposal*

## Best Politician on Business Issues

### Jan Martin

She might have been on Colorado Springs City Council for just two and a half years, but Jan Martin has made a strong impression on the area's business community.

Identified as the "best politician on business issues" by CSBJ readers, she is a third generation native of the Pikes Peak region and a third generation business owner.

Her credits include past or current board membership on the Downtown Partnership Board, the El Paso County Community Outreach Group, Citizen's Project and Leadership Pikes Peak, as well volunteer service on several local nonprofit and charitable committees.

Her company, Martin Business Group, was founded during 1993 to assist business owners with their Internet, computing, and Web site design and development needs. That entrepreneurial skill comes in handy during City Council sessions focused on topics such as the city budget, economic development, delivery of city services and cost-cutting measures.

A self-proclaimed fiscal conservative, Martin believes government should be held accountable for spending taxpayer dollars. She also believes Colorado Springs hasn't yet reached its full potential.

"In order to do so, I feel the community needs to come together and work as a whole. In so doing, we can attract and retain businesses and create a city where people are proud to say 'I live in Colorado Springs,'" she said in a Web statement outlining her philosophy.

*Runners-up: Jerry Heimlicher, Keith King*

## Best Private Golf Course

### The Broadmoor

As the host for the 2008 U.S. Senior Open Tournament and the site of the U.S. Women's Open during 2011, The Broadmoor's three golf courses again took top honors in the CSBJ poll.

The five-star hotel and resort is a likely choice based on its historic, beautifully groomed links, designed by three renowned course designers.

The East Course - last year's tournament location - was designed by master golf course architect Donald Ross. Its debut coincided with the original Broadmoor Golf Club, which opened during 1918.

During 1950, Robert Trent Jones designed nine additional holes and returned during 1965 to complete what is currently the West Course.

The third 18 holes - The Mountain Course - was opened during 1976, closed during 2002 and reopened following a redesign by Jack Nicklaus.

Golfers and their guests can enjoy a light lunch at the Golf Club Grille, with its pub atmosphere and

full bar service, or the full-service Golf Club dining room, which focuses on casual, outdoor dining.

The dining room features window walls that open onto an awning-covered patio, complete with an exterior fire pit.

Golf Director Russ Miller credits the Broadmoor golf experience to a combination of "history, tradition, immaculate course conditions, and the sheer beauty of the Rocky Mountains."

*Runners-up: Flying Horse Golf Club, Kissing Camels Golf Club*

## Best Public Access Golf Course

### Patty Jewett

Designed during 1889, the Patty Jewett Golf Course is the third oldest course west of the Mississippi River. The City of Colorado Springs has owned the course since 1919.

Its canopy of 100-year old trees and wrought iron-bordered entry make it one of the city's most beautiful - and historic - landmarks.

The golf course might also be one of the state's busiest, accommodating thousands of foursomes annually on its scenic 27-holes, according to Dal Lockwood, golf manager for the City of Colorado Springs.

"Patty Jewett is in a great part of town with lots of mature trees," he said, adding that it has hosted the Pikes Peak Amateur Golf Tournament for more than 70 years.

Each tee features four different positions, allowing players of all skill levels to perfect their games. This year, the course saw a renovation of all greenside bunkers on the Peak and Plains nines.

While fertilizer and water costs have risen steadily, Lockwood said the course has been able to keep golfer fees relatively low. During the past year, the cost to play a nine-hole round went up by a dollar. For now, the course's timeless design - and its well-maintained surfaces - remains key to its popularity.

"We're a municipal course so we cater to a broad range of players," Lockwood said. "We do close to 130,000 nine-hole rounds annually."

*Runners-up: Pine Creek Golf Course, Valley Hi*

## Best Public Relations Firm

### Vladimir Jones

A full year into its rebranding campaign, Vladimir Jones has embraced the duality of art and commerce in today's advertising and marketing world.

President Meredith Vaughan heads the 38-year-old firm that was started by her parents, Jim and Nechie Hall, during 1970. The V.J. moniker reflects the spirit of the company, which emphasizes values such as curiosity and focus - and specializes in integrated marketing, advertising, communications and insight.

During the past year, the agency's "H" campaign for Penrose-St. Francis Health Services was awarded a "Best of Show" 2009 Aster Award.

"Penrose-St. Francis is our agency's oldest client, and we were delighted to celebrate this win for them," Vaughan said.

Vladimir Jones employs about 70 people in its Colorado Springs and Denver offices.

*Runners-up: Sandia Advertising and Marketing, Lisa Bachman*

## Best Radio Station for Business News

### KRDO FM 105.5 and 1240 AM

This year's pick for Best Radio Station for Business News was KRDO 105.5 F.M. and 1240 A.M.

Program director Mike Lewis credits his station's growing popularity to an updated format that targets mostly local stories and focuses several hours daily on programs that help listeners navigate a tough economy.

"We know the economy and financial issues affect everyone, so we've partnered with business advisers like Dave Ramsey, who had a very successful appearance here in April, and added consumer advocate Clark Howard to our daily ABC programming, along with Dr. Laura who focuses on personal

relationships," he said. "And we've made a conscious decision to stay away from politics."

The station's talk shows also have proven popular, featuring a four-hour morning program hosted by Lewis and Lee Richards covering local community and business news, as well as three hours of local and national news between 4 and 7 p.m.

"We've been fine tuning the line-up since we went on the air under new ownership in August 2006," Lewis said. "We keep trying to become better at what we do."

*Runners-up: 740 KVOR, KRCC 91.5 FM*

## Best Real Estate Management Company

### Griffis/Blessing

The CSBJ readers agree with Inc. magazine: Griffis/Blessing is one of the best companies in town.

In addition to being named "best" in Colorado Springs, the company was one of Inc. magazine's top 500 fastest growing companies in the United States. The company also has won the Better Business Bureau Excellence in Customer Service Award, the Apartment Association's Owner/Operator of the Year Award.

A real estate services firm that represents individual, corporate and institutional owners, Griffis/Blessing has more than 160 employees and manages properties in Denver, Colorado Springs, Pueblo and Loveland.

Its total portfolio includes 4,000 residential units and more than 3 million square feet of commercial property.

*Runners-up: Cameron Butcher, Re/Max*

## Best Recycling/Waste Company

### Bestway Disposal

Colorado Springs, Manitou Springs and Fountain Valley residents are wild about trash - having it removed, that is, in a timely and consistent manner.

That's why CSBJ readers chose Bestway Disposal as the Best Recycling/Waste Company in the region.

For the past six decades, Bestway has been customer-service oriented and offers a 100 percent service guarantee. Bestway promises to provide consistent pickup times, keep container areas free of debris, empty containers completely and close the lids.

During 1967, the Kiemel family operated with three trucks and a few hundred customers, but the company has grown along with the city.

Now Bestway has 50 Department of Transportation certified drivers, 12 customer service staff, seven full-time mechanics and 15 additional support staff.

And Bestway was the first waste removal company in the region to offer single-stream recycling, with its Way Green program - "no bagging, no sorting, no hassle."

*Runners-up: Waste Management, Waste Connections Inc.*

## Best Residential Real Estate Company

### Re/Max

Re/Max International is proof that a company can take on the world and still take care of its clients at the local level.

Voted Best Residential Real Estate Company by CSBJ readers, Re/Max is a Colorado-grown company, co-founded by Dave and Gail Liniger during 1973. They still run the company, which started as a single office and has grown to a global network of nearly 100,000 sales associates in more than 70 countries.

Re/Max agents average 12 years of experience selling real estate, and offer a variety of services, for first-time home buyers and experienced investors.

According to the National Realtors Association, 87 percent of homebuyers begin their search on the Internet. And remax.com features all U.S. home listings in thousands of cities and towns, and has millions of visitors each month.

Customers not only choose Re/Max for the service but because the company gives back to the

community.

Nationally, Re/Max's Premier Community Citizenship program has raised nearly \$100 million for such organizations as Susan G. Komen for the Cure and the Children's Miracle Network.

Locally, a Springs office founded a local chapter of Sentinels of Freedom Foundation. The agents and staff volunteer their time and raise money to assist severely wounded veterans and their families.

*Runners-up: Gloriod & Associates, ERA Shields*

## Best Restaurant for a Business Breakfast

### The Olive Branch Restaurant

Truth be told, it's a toss up. What do people notice first when they walk into the Olive Branch Restaurant downtown?

Is it the smell of cinnamon rolls or lemon bread from the in-house bakery? Or is it all the power brokers - former politicians, hotshot attorneys, bankers and judges - several of whom can be found brokering deals or networking each weekday among the early-morning clientele?

The Olive Branch caters to special dietary needs and recently rolled out a gluten-free menu. But you don't have to be on a diet, medical or otherwise, to enjoy the fresh food, espresso, juice bar and smoothies.

Yes, they offer a tofu scramble and soy milk, but there's plenty to tempt even the most carnivorous patrons. Popular breakfast entrees include the Eggs Olive Branch - a twist on a Benedict, with bacon and avocado peaking out beneath the hollandaise, the California Omelet, the Works Skillet and the Flying Dutchman - whole grain French toast, bacon and an egg, for those who like a little bit of everything.

The servers are friendly and keep the coffee refilled, the food is fabulous and CSBJ readers know a good deal when they see one.

The Olive Branch also serves lunch and dinner, and opens Mondays through Saturdays at 6:30 a.m., and Sundays at 8 a.m.

*Runners-up: The Omelette Parlor, The Egg & I*

## Best Restaurant for a Business Dinner

### The Famous

Need to impress a client? Walk confidently into The Famous - after making reservations, of course - where the maitre d' will greet you by name and smoothly usher your party to an elegant leather booth and hand you a straightforward but irresistible menu.

The menu foregoes trite and fanciful descriptions, but the food defies all expectations. Consistently, the Jumbo Shrimp Cocktail is fresh and cold, served with a serious cocktail sauce and crisp celery in a martini glass. Or try the classic Oysters Rockefeller - even civilized, suit-clad guests have been known to spar over the last one on the plate.

But by now you've sipped on a dirty Grey Goose martini or a sidecar, with Christian Brothers brandy, Cointreau and fresh squeezed lemon with a sugared rim.

One of your clients has ordered a bottle of T-Vine zinfandel, and the evening promises to be as delectable as the cuisine.

Then the entrees arrive - a thick tuna steak, flown in fresh from Hawaii, a Colorado rack of lamb, and a 20-ounce Prime Kansas City bone-in strip steak.

Ah, yes, this is the life.

Dinner starts nightly at 4 p.m., and live music starts at 6:30 p.m., Tuesdays through Saturdays. But don't get too sidetracked, because dinner would not be complete without dessert.

Many regulars swear The Famous has the best crême brulee in town, while others cannot live without the New York-style cheesecake with fresh berries, macerated in Grand Marnier.

Whatever you choose, the service is friendly and efficient, the wine list is ample, and if you linger, you'll find yourself at the piano bar, singing along like the good old days.

*Runners-up: MacKenzie's Chop House, Blue Star, Walter's Bistro*

## Best Restaurant for a Business Lunch

## **The Famous**

When it's time to roll up the sleeves for deal-making over lunch, CSBJ readers head over to The Famous.

And if you're not a powerful attorney, banker or corporate bigwig, you can watch the deals going down in one of the round booths while noshing on a perfectly grilled salmon fillet or one of the daily burger specials.

For lighter fare, regulars are crazy about the Crab Stuffed Avocado Salad and the Prime New York Strip Steak salad with classic Caesar dressing - and don't forget the soft melt-in-your-mouth bread with butter.

Dining at The Famous is like taking a trip back in time to the old-fashioned but swanky comfort of a big-city steakhouse, where service is prompt and the ambience soothes the soul.

The Famous opens for lunch Mondays through Fridays at 11 a.m.

*Runners-up: The Ritz, MacKenzie's Chop House*

## **Best Small Company with the Most Promising Future**

### **Buffalo Builders Inc.**

Buffalo Builders Inc. was founded during 2004 in Colorado Springs by Russ Negaard, who found a niche in the construction industry, and has since expanded throughout the state.

A general contractor for both residential and commercial projects, the company specializes in restoration, property rehabilitations, remodeling and renovations. With preferred contractor status, Buffalo Builders "leads the way" in the insurance repair industry.

The company prides itself on helping clients during catastrophic and disaster recovery, and also specializes in mold mitigation.

CSBJ readers chose Buffalo Builders as Best Small Company with the Most Promising Future because, "We take extreme pride in our ability to relate to every customer, whether it is an individual homeowner, insurance agent or property manager," said Mark Labertew, chief operating officer.

The company has done ground-up construction or restoration for such diverse structures as art galleries, charitable organizations, auto-parts stores, churches and pubs.

Each staff member is local to Colorado. The corporate office is in downtown Colorado Springs, and the company also has offices in Pueblo, Fort Collins and Denver.

As other construction companies are downsizing or closing, Buffalo Builders has plans to expand into New Mexico and Arizona, while maintaining its quality assurance standards and customer service.

*Runners-up: Stockman, Kast, Ryan and Co., BiggsKofford*

## **Best Staffing Service**

### **Add Staff Inc.**

Add Staff Inc. celebrated its 25th anniversary during June.

Founder and President Cari Shaffer is known throughout the region as the go-to person for community service and for running a superb staffing service.

Since 1984, the business has expanded to include 16 full-time staffing professionals with more than 210 years of combined human resources and staffing experience. Clients know they will receive fast response and quality placement for their organizations.

During 1992, the company acquired Contract Technical Services Inc., and thus the ability to provide technical staffing for its client base. This added jobs in the defense, aerospace, information technology, engineering and light assembly and manufacturing sectors.

Add Staff specializes in accounting, technical, engineering, IT, administrative, human resource, purchasing, executive search and medical/dental placements.

Shaffer credits the loyalty of her clients and their repeat business and referrals for the company's success.

*Runners up: Account Abilities, Office Team*

## **Best Television Station for Business News**

## KOAA 5/30

Times sure have changed since June 29, 1953.

Back then, a broadcasting day for KCSJ-TV lasted only nine or 10 hours because Channel 5 was limited to local programming. The short day was short-lived, however.

On July 5, 1953, the station officially became an NBC affiliate, and has been expanding rapidly since.

Purchased by KOA-TV in Denver during 1961, it received the call letters KOAA-TV, and the addition of a video recorder put an end to live commercials.

Fast forward to 1978, and the station jumped to second in the ratings and began focusing on coverage of community events to connect with viewers.

By 1982, KOAA-TV's Eyewitness News was No. 1 in the ratings at 10 p.m., and viewers stayed loyal.

KOAA has been named Station of the Year by the Colorado Broadcasters Association more than 20 times, and wins awards from the Associated Press each year, as well as an occasional Emmy.

By 2003, the station added a satellite news gathering vehicle, and 2004 brought 24/7 local weather and forecasts.

During August 2006, the station launched KOAA-DT, the most powerful digital signal of any television station in southern Colorado.

KOAA sponsors numerous events and fundraisers, while readers continue to tune in, watch, listen - and vote for their favorite station.

*Runners-up: KKTU 11, KXRM Fox21*

## Best Thing to Happen to Southern Colorado Business This Year

### Fort Carson Expansion

The Pikes Peak region adores the military - and not just because residents are grateful and appreciative of all the troops do for the United States.

Local installations are vital to the economy, and savvy CSBJ readers chose Fort Carson expansion as the Best Thing to Happen to Southern Colorado Business this Year.

Growth at Fort Carson provides significant opportunities in the region, including adding primary jobs, inducing secondary jobs and accounting for a large percentage of local construction.

During the federal fiscal year of 2008, Fort Carson - the second largest employer in the state - spent \$428 million on construction projects, which contributed more than \$1 billion in annual payroll to active duty military and civilians.

Between 2006 and 2015, \$2.4 billion in construction is planned for Fort Carson - about \$1 billion of which has already been spent.

Fort Carson's soldier population is expected to double during the same time frame, increasing troops from 12,600 to nearly 26,000.

And by 2013, about 30,000 military family members are expected, growing the family-member population to about 60,000.

*Runners-up: USOC staying in Colorado Springs, Southern Delivery System approval*

## Best Title Company

### Land Title Guarantee Co.

Land Title Guarantee Co. was founded in Colorado Springs during 1971 and provides title insurance and information services required by the real estate and mortgage industries.

"We've grown our market share by 5 percent this year," said Branch Manager Randy Slaybaugh.

"We've had to properly resize our company like most businesses in this economy, but we've been able to accomplish that without sacrificing quality of service to our customers."

The company provides title service for four segments: residential, builder, commercial and lender. Slaybaugh said all of those segments give Land Title the opportunity to conduct business with locally independent companies.

"Every dollar spent at a locally owned business recirculates in a community six times over," Slaybaugh said. "All of our eggs are in this basket. When people do business with Land Title, the money stays here. It doesn't go to California or Minnesota or Florida."

*Runners-up: Security Title, Stewart Title, Empire Title*

## Best Travel Agency for Business Travel

### Charlie Brown's Good Time Travel

Charlie Brown worked in the radio industry for 21 years prior to creating Charlie Browns Good Time Travel during 1985.

After selling KILO radio, the Colorado Springs album-oriented rock station he founded during 1978, Brown was forced to adhere to a five-year non-compete clause, so he opened the travel agency with plans to eventually re-enter radio.

But, the travel agency performed so well and Brown enjoyed the work so much that he nixed his radio plans and continued in the travel business.

"I think the main reason we've earned this honor is our reputation," Brown said. "We've been here for such a long time and continue to do the things people want us to do, that I think our name comes to mind when people think about traveling."

One question Brown constantly hears from people around town is, 'how do you survive in the age of the Internet.'"

"Well, the truth is - the Internet isn't really that great," he said. "People find they've either paid too much or there is nobody there to help them if something goes wrong. We have a lot of clients come back to us after they've suffered a painful travel experience booked over the Internet."

*Runners-up: Academy Travel and Tours Inc., High Plains Travel*

## Best Trucking/Freight Company

### Yellow Transportation

During March 2009, YRC Worldwide Inc. announced the integration of national networks Yellow Transportation and Roadway.

Building on the strength of its heritage brands, the new enterprise provides global transportation services, transportation management solutions and logistics management.

YRC offers more than 160 combined years of experience moving big shipments. As soon as the ink dried on the deal, the new company implemented a strategic, phased-in approach to the integration.

With nearly 450 service centers, YRC now offers about 100 more service centers than either Roadway or Yellow did individually. The changes provide 21,000 additional direct service points and positions YRC 20 percent closer to customers in major markets. This enables quicker pickups and deliveries, increased flexibility and reduced emissions.

*Runners up: UPS, Two Men and a Truck*

## Best Up-and-Coming Business Leader Under 40

### Chris Blees

Chris Blees needed just 13 years to rise from entry-level accountant to CEO at BiggsKofford P.C., one of the highest profile firms in Colorado Springs.

BiggsKofford Vice President Kurt Kofford has touted Blees' vision and proactive nature as one of the firm's greatest assets, and BiggsKofford needed that leadership more during the past year than perhaps any other.

"He led the forefront of our firm very early on in the recession," Kofford said. "I don't know if any of us knew what was going to happen, but he led the charge and helped us be proactive in that regard."

BiggsKofford recently hosted the Western Association of Accounting firms, where its financials were reviewed, resulting in some great kudos for Blees.

"Our firm is up," Kofford said. "Compared to other accounting firms we were top of the heap, and that is a testament to Chris' great leadership."

Blees has earned CSBJ's Best Up-and-Coming Business Leader for two years running.

*Runners up: Trevor Dierdorff, Reno Resser*

## Best Video Production Company

### Monster Zero Creative/Watt Imagination

Monster Zero Creative director Pete Schuermann and Watt Imagination owner Rob Watt don't have large staffs or extravagant sound stages. The two business owners like to maintain flexibility when taking on a project, whether it be a full-blown movie or a short commercial advertisement.

"We like to look for the best freelancers and creative people on a per project basis," Schuermann said. "It's always a question of pulling together the right teams, based on what the client desires, and then trying to provide the best professional results."

Watt and Schuermann launched their businesses at the turn of the century, starting with more budget conscious television commercials, but have evolved into larger projects, including "Haze" a documentary film venture with a six-figure budget.

The combined firms have worked locally on projects for the Pikes Peak or Bust Rodeo, TKA Advertising, Comcast, Reflections Advertising and Court Appointed Special Advocates.

*Runners-up: Bourbon Street Productions, IMS Productions*

## Best Wealth Adviser

### Strategic Financial Partners

Colorado Springs Business Journal readers have bestowed the honor of Best Wealth Adviser on Strategic Financial Partners for the fifth consecutive year.

Started from scratch during 2004, Strategic Financial Partners grows by an average of eight advisers a year, and despite the struggling economy, the company equaled that number again this past year.

"There has been a dramatic spotlight on individual and business investment portfolios," Founder and CEO John Ferguson said. "Our clients appreciate the close contact and communication we have provided during this period of extreme volatility, and sticking to our established business model has helped us gain new clients."

SFP's revenue generated from fees is up 50 percent compared to last year and Ferguson responded by signing a 10-year lease on the 20,000 square feet of office space the firm occupies at 1755 Telstar Drive.

*Runners-up: Huntley Thatcher Ellsworth, BiggsKofford*

## Best Web Site Developer

### Infront

Founded by Andy and Joan Meng during 1994, Infront has earned CSBJ's Best Web site Developer honor for the fourth year running.

Infront is a full-service media agency with professionals in Web site design, architecture, Web site development and technology, as well as Internet marketing.

The company specializes in managing large Internet marketing budgets and helps companies map a course in search engine marketing and e-mail campaigns.

Andy Meng said the company's programmers, designers and marketers overlap in their understanding, but all specialize in their own areas.

Infront focuses on three areas when creating a site - credibility, findability and usability.

The Web site developer typically works with companies like the El Pomar Foundation, Experience Colorado Springs at Pikes Peak, the City of Cripple Creek and Colorado College.

*Runners-up: Advanced Business Solutions, Bracewell Web Works*

## Best Wireless Provider

### Verizon Wireless

New Jersey-based Verizon Wireless is a joint venture of Verizon Communications and Vodafone.

The company is the largest wireless voice and data carrier in the United States, with 86.6 million customers, and touts its customer loyalty as the highest in the industry.

The company employs more than 86,000 people, boasts average annual revenue of \$58.6 billion and

operates 2,000 retail outlets around the country.

During 2009, Verizon bolstered its nationwide market share by acquiring Alltel Wireless and expanding its 3G broadband network.

During April, the company earned its third consecutive American Brand Excellence Award for its telecommunications service, a national honor bestowed by senior executives of small- and medium-sized businesses.

*Runners-up: AT&T, T-Mobile*

## Best Woman Business Leader

### Cari Shaffer

Cari Shaffer developed a business plan and secured a loan from what is now Wells Fargo Bank during 1984. Since then, she's built and managed Add Staff, a successful placement firm for more than 25 years, and she's gleaned knowledge and expertise from nearly everyone she's come in contact with.

"It was intimidating to me for many years, rubbing elbows around the various board rooms as I served on business, civic and nonprofit boards," she said. "But, I went to school through the highly successful business leaders I met in organizations like the Colorado Springs Chamber, the Better Business Bureau and the Economic Development Corp. I've shared my knowledge but have gained so much more in return."

Volunteering her time to civic and community organizations has paid dividends in the business world.

"Being involved helps you hone your skills," she said. "You learn best practices from people who volunteer their time, skills and experience and you take those back to your company and apply them in your own day to day work."

*Runners-up: Vicki Dimond, Kathy Boe*



[AG bans seven loan companies from doing business in Colorado](#)

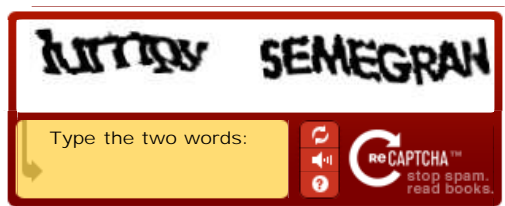
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