

## Shelton CPAs Named Business of Year



BRIDGEPORT — Drivers accustomed to seeing billboards touting the merits of Merit Insurance on Interstate 95 and Route 8 will need to take another look — Merit's out and the CPAs are in.

The Bridgeport Regional Business Council on Wednesday named Shelton-based accounting firm Nishball, Carp, Niedermeier, Pacowta & Co. P.C. as its business of the year. Its prize, contributed by Lamar Outdoor Advertising, is a year of free billboard advertising on the highways as well as secondary and tertiary roads.

"It's an honor to see how people perceive you," said managing partner Mike Niedermeier.

Members of the BRBC nominate companies; the finalists, recognized for their work in their communities, receive Impact Awards. The other finalists this year were: Bridgeport Bluefish Get Hooked! LLC; OperationsInc.; Hometown Publications; and the Bridgeport Sound Tigers.

During its annual lunch at the Bridgeport Holiday Inn and Convention Center, the BRBC also recognized volunteer of the year

Kathy Saint, president of The Schwerdtle Stamp Co.

Saint said she learned the importance of giving back to the community from her parents. In addition to being a leader in the area's METAL manufacturing cluster, she also — among other projects — is co-chair of the Education Work Council. None of the fixes for the city will work unless its schools are working, she told an audience that filled a big ballroom. That audience also got a look at a new commercial for BMW of Bridgeport.

"It really highlights the city of Bridgeport," said BRBC Chairman Robert Trefry, who is president and CEO of Bridgeport Hospital.

"Take a look around. It's better in Bridgeport," the 30-second black-and-white spot urges. The dealership draws customers from Fairfield and New Haven counties, said Ed McGill, a co-owner and principal. Its biggest problem has been dealing with customers' prejudices about Bridgeport. He and his partners believe in the city and wanted to attack the issue in a "real and positive way," McGill said of the television spot.

Paul Macari, a vice president and general manager of Lamar Outdoor Advertising, also sees building up Bridgeport as a responsibility for the businesses that operate here.

Lamar owns the billboards that showcase the business of the year.

"It's my intention to make this an annual award," Macari said; Merit was the first award recipient to win the \$150,000 in billboard advertising.

"Bridgeport-area businesses need to support each other," Macari said.

This year's winner not only encourages its employees to volunteer time and money to local causes, but it offers in-kind financial expertise to area groups, the BRBC said in describing Nishball, Carp, Niedermeier, Pacowta & Co. P.C.

"They are active and energized and engaged in Bridgeport," said BRBC President and Chief Executive Officer Paul Timpanelli of the CPA firm.

About three years ago, the firm decided to consolidate its Bridgeport and Waterbury offices in Shelton, said Niedermeier, who lives in the Trumbull house in which he grew up. But his family, which owned the Beechmont Dairy, was always involved in the city. His partners are the same way — for instance, Stanley Carp is one of the returning CPAs every year for the *Connecticut Post* and Connecticut Society of Certified Public Accountants' "Ask the CPA" call-in night. And the hope for new hires in any capacity, Niedermeier said, is they will get involved in their community because, "You only get back what you give."

That idea — in a somewhat different form — also came up during the keynote address by former U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, who is now the state's first business advocate.

Simmons spoke of the approximately 60,000 business cards he handed out during his years in Congress — each redeemable for 15 minutes of uninterrupted time with him. That same promise holds true with his new cards, Simmons said.

His charge is helping the state's business people cut through the "red tape and

alphabet soup" that blocks business from getting done.

"I can serve as a point of contact for collaboration and referrals," said Simmons, who referenced Connecticut's poor showing — number 28 out of 50 — in a 2006 Forbes magazine ranking of the best states for business. "We do well in labor [skills and education]," he said. "We do badly in business costs and regulatory environment & That's a challenge for government."

Dynamic and vibrant cities are second only to education among the list of ingredients that are key to a successful state, Simmons said. "If Bridgeport is weak, the surrounding towns are weak." — *Connecticut Post* 6/14/07

