

Business

Small-business honor goes to Summer Infant

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The Woonsocket-based manufacturer of children's-care products is chosen Small Business Leader of the Year.

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The Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce has selected **Summer Infant** Inc. for the Small Business Leader of the Year Award. The company was to receive the award last night, at the chamber's annual meeting, the largest annual gathering of business leaders.

Summer Infant, a Woonsocket-based manufacturer of children's-care products, is not a new company. It started in 1984, and at various times it has located its corporate headquarters in Cumberland, Lincoln and North Smithfield.

In 2001, Jason P. Macari and Steven Gibree acquired the company and initiated an aggressive growth plan. (Last year, a New York venture capital firm, KBL Healthcare Acquisition Corp. II, bought **Summer Infant** for \$41 million and later took it public. Macari is now president and chief operating officer; Gibree is the executive vice president of product development.)

The company has since grown from 5 employees to 70 in Rhode Island, where it recently opened a new, \$4-million, 52,000-square-foot building in Woonsocket, according to spokeswoman Cindy Barlow. Another 30 staff members work outside the state.

"We are so excited," Barlow said yesterday of the chamber award. "It's kind of a validation of all the hard work, and sticking to our roots in Rhode Island."

The chamber honors businesses with 100 employees or fewer for creating original products or services and for job growth, profitability and community involvement.

Last night's event, at the Rhode Island Convention Center, was expected to draw at least 700 participants, according to Chamber spokeswoman Bethany E. Costello.

Joseph Quinlan, the chief market strategist for Bank of America's global wealth and investment management, was scheduled to deliver the keynote address at 8:10 p.m. (For full coverage of Quinlan's speech, titled "America's Shifting Role in the World Economy," see page B-1.)

Earlier this month, **Sumner Infant** (SUMR:Nasdaq) reported third- quarter net income of \$1.1 million, compared with \$558,000 a year earlier. Revenue was \$21.2 million, up 55 percent, from \$13.68 million in the same period a year ago.

Last year, Stephen Lane and Aidan Petrie, cofounders of Item Group, a product development firm in Providence, received the chamber's small-business award.

Also at last night's ceremony, the chamber planned to name Concordia Manufacturing as its Manufacturer of the Year.

Concordia, based in Coventry, is increasing its staff at a time when many manufacturers in the state are shrinking or closing their local operations.

In August, Concordia announced that it had received \$250,000 from the Slater Technology Fund - money the company said it would use to help it triple its manufacturing space dedicated to biomedical products.

"It's a very exciting time for us," Randal W. Spencer, Concordia's president and chief executive officer, said at the time.

Last year's honoree was Hexagon Metrology Inc., a North Kingstown- based global supplier of metrology equipment and software.

The chamber yesterday also honored Jeannine Dugas, a senior account executive for Cox Media, Cox Communications' advertising division, as its Ambassador of the Year.

Dugas was chosen by a committee of 70 people who "provide critical membership liaison services between the chamber and its member businesses."

In 2005, the award went to Colleen ElSawabi, a former vice president of commercial lending at Citizens Financial Group. ElSawabi no longer works at Citizens, according to a Citizens spokeswoman.

Last year, Ralph Coppola, of Providence-based Meridien Benefits Group Inc., an executive benefits firm, received the recognition.

Also last night, the Chamber was scheduled to pay a special tribute to Charles T. Francis, president/partner of the Rhode Island office of CB Richard Ellis New England, a commercial real-estate firm, and past chairman of the Chamber's board of directors.