

WINNING WOMEN

Twelve outstanding female business leaders from throughout the St. Louis region were honored at Winning Women's 3rd annual Women Influencing Now Regional Economic Development Awards Dinner held at the Missouri History Museum.

About 200 people attended the awards dinner sponsored by AmerenUE, Illinois American Water, Acropolis, Clear Channel Radio, Purk and Associates, Panera, AT&T and the St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association.

"We were beyond sold out," says Michelle Esswein, founder, president and CEO of Winning Women. "It was really great to see so many people come out to honor these women of influence."

Winning Women is a non-profit organization that brings together some of the region's most influential female business leaders to foster business growth and development, to increase the visibility of women's contributions, and to demonstrate that women can achieve at any level. Its mission is to contribute to the region's economic development in business, education, government, and health initiatives as well as to reinforce the region's position as a desirable community in which women can build successful careers, businesses and family lives.

"The unique thing about the Women Influencing Now Awards is the fact that they bring together the entire region," Esswein says. "We had all of the key officials there to recognize these women—St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay, St. Louis County Executive Charlie Dooley, St. Charles Mayor Patty York, and Madison County Board Chairman Alan Dunstan."

This year's honorees include: Julie Hauser, President of The Hauser Group; Tracy Hart, CEO of Tarlton Corporation; Blair Forlaw, Regional Talent Development, St. Louis RCGA; Sheila Sweeney, Owner of S.M. Sweeney & Company; Marie Carlie, Senior Member, Stone Carlie & Company; Sunny Schaefer, Executive Director of Operation Food Search; Nancy Schneider, President/Owner of Ronan Signs; Susan Cutler,

CEO of Wainwright Industries; Billy Collier, Executive Director of United Services; Geri Boyer, Founder/Managing Partner of Kaskaskia Engineering Group; Jane Saale, President/CEO of Cope Plastics; and Christine Spargur, Chief Community Relations for the 375th Air Mobility Wing, Scott Air Force Base.

"We had a wonderful group of women this year. But then we do every year," says Esswein. "Since we developed the awards in 2008, the number of applicants has increased. What's surprising is that each year we have a huge new pool to choose from and from very diverse businesses. So it's been a very positive experience. But it's also been unfortunate because we've had some wonderful women who didn't receive awards that weren't nominated again. But we have so many applicants and you can't give an award to everyone even though you'd like to. We really wish a lot of those women who didn't get an award before would be nominated again."

Award recipients are nominated by their peers in one of three categories: entrepreneur, executive, and public service. Each application must be accompanied by a one page essay on the nominee's contributions to the region's economic development; no resumes or bios are accepted. As this is the case, the person submitting the nomination must know the woman very well and this, Esswein says, makes the process fair to everyone. She also adds that nominating such women of influence is very necessary if they are to be recognized for what they do.

"Generally speaking, women don't like to talk about themselves, their accomplishments, or just how good they are. So they typically down play what they do," she explains. "And because few people are aware of their contributions. That's why we developed these awards. There are so many women out there contributing to the economic development of this region. They need to be recognized not only for what they do, but for making the St. Louis region a better place for everyone."



(Left to right): RCGA's Blair Forlaw receives an award from Mayor Francis Slay and Becky Fine of Panera and vice chair of the Winning Women board.



Front row: Jane Saale; Mayor Patti York; Sunny Schaefer; Michelle Esswein, Founder, President & CEO of Winning Women; Julie Hauser; Geri Boyer; Christine Spargur

Back Row: Shelia Sweeney; County Executive Charlie Dooley; Billy Collier; Nancy Schneider; Susan Cutler; Madison County Board Chair Alan Dunstan; Tracy Hart

Not pictured: Marie Carlie and Blair Forlaw