



News Release

PRESS OFFICE

Release Date: May 24, 2010
Release Number: 10-28

Contact: Carol Chastang (202) 205-6987
Internet Address: <http://www.sba.gov/news>

SBA Honors Outstanding Disaster Recovery Efforts

WASHINGTON – A North Dakota mayor who managed to organize local efforts to stave off a major flood, the owner of a South Texas construction firm who is working to rebuild a more hurricane-resilient city, and two women from American Samoa who connected tsunami survivors with recovery assistance were each presented with Phoenix Awards today during the U.S. Small Business Administration’s National Small Business Week 2010 in Washington, D.C.

The awards were given this afternoon during a luncheon sponsored by AT&T at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

“These individuals displayed tremendous courage and resourcefulness in the midst of several devastating disasters,” said SBA Administrator Karen G. Mills. “The Phoenix Award acknowledges their heroic efforts, and is a token of appreciation for their contributions to the economic recovery of their communities.”

Fargo, N.D. Mayor Dennis Walaker received the Phoenix Award for Outstanding Contributions to Disaster Recovery by a Public Official. Following record snowfalls in December 2008 and again in March 2009, weather forecasters were predicting major flooding for Fargo. By March 27, the Red River had risen above the record of 40.1 feet to 40.3 feet. As the river inched toward its crest, Walaker maintained a realistic analysis of the situation. While some 2,000 nursing home residents and 185 hospital patients were transferred by air, ambulance and bus to Minneapolis, Sioux Falls and Bismarck, the mayor decided against evacuating the city. He said it would be like walking away from a fight.

As the waters rose, Walaker became a non-stop, yet reassuring bundle of energy. He managed thousands of volunteers who built more than 40 miles of dikes and earthen walls to surround the city. More than 3,600 Fargo residents worked to fill three million sandbags in five days.

Walaker’s vision, diligence and experience as a veteran flood fighter made it possible for Fargo to withstand what could have been severe flooding, and prevented, according to estimates, more than a billion dollars in damages.

Michael McDaniel, owner of McDaniel Construction & McDaniel Properties of Galveston, Texas, received the Phoenix Award for Small Business Disaster Recovery. When Hurricane Ike slammed into Galveston Island on Sept 12, 2008, with 110 mph winds and a ferocious storm surge, McDaniel and his team from McDaniel Construction, despite evacuation warnings, stayed

--more --

behind to physically secure buildings belonging to friends, family and clients.

Yet McDaniel's business sustained damages totaling \$245,000, and the 22-unit apartment complex he owned with his wife suffered losses worth \$644,000.

A Galveston native with deep roots in the community, McDaniel was committed to preserving the area's character while rebuilding it better and stronger. He received two SBA disaster loans for \$610,000 to reconstruct his business and the apartment complex. Meanwhile, he and his 18 full-time employees never took a break and within 90 days, 22 families were able to return to the apartment complex.

In addition to contributing to the economic stability of Galveston by quickly getting his staff back to work, Michael created many new jobs in the area, hiring subcontractors to rebuild the city. Meanwhile, McDaniel Construction is improving the standard by which homes vulnerable to hurricanes should be built, reconstructing the damaged properties and building new homes that can stand up to heavy wind storms.

Elda Najera-Suisala and Lori Sword of Pago-Pago, American Samoa received the Phoenix Award for Outstanding Contributions to Disaster Recovery by a Volunteer. Phone service was shut down after an 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck the Samoan islands on September 29, 2009, triggering a tsunami. Thirty-four people died in American Samoa, a South Pacific island of 77 square miles, and property damage was widespread.

Najera-Suisala, still had Internet access. She used Facebook and other social networks to help survivors contact their families and friends on the U.S. mainland. Lori Sword runs a radio station on the island and stayed on-air non-stop, giving information about recovery assistance and providing spiritual support in Samoan and English. The two later teamed up and filled cars with donated food, water, medical supplies and clothing to distribute to families on the island.

The pair reached out to the island's survivors in remote mountain areas. They provided care to those who had not yet received assistance, gathering crutches and wheelchairs for people who needed them, and clothing and food for those who had gone without for several days.

Since 1998, the SBA has presented Phoenix Awards to business owners, public officials and volunteers who have displayed selflessness, ingenuity and tenacity in the aftermath of a disaster, while contributing to the rebuilding of their communities.

SBA makes low-interest, taxpayer-backed disaster loans to homeowners, renters, businesses and non-profit organizations of all sizes. More information about the disaster assistance program is available at www.sba.gov/disasterassistance.

For more information about National Small Business Week, visit www.sba.gov/sbw.

Small Business Week 2010 sponsors and cosponsors include: SCORE, Sam's Club, Ford, Visa, ADP, Raytheon, Cbeyond, Intuit, Google, eBay, Northrop Grumman, AT&T, Lockheed Martin, D&B, Verio, Association of Small Business Development Centers (ASBDC), NADCO, NAGGL, and NASE.

The U.S. Small Business Administration's participation in this cosponsored activity does not constitute an express or implied endorsement of any cosponsor's, donor's, grantee's, contractor's or participant's opinions, products, or services. All SBA programs and cosponsored programs are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis. Reasonable arrangements for persons with disabilities will be made, if requested at least 2 weeks in advance, by contacting sbw@sba.gov. Cosponsorship Authorization #SBW2010.