Larry Kendall: Lifetime of achievement

Aims Community College has Regional Spirit

Energy Logic Emerging into the future
Larry Kendall easy choice for tenth Bravo! Lifetime Achievement award

Larry Kendall’s still-youthful face belies the decades he spent — along with several hundred “shareholders” — building The Group Inc. Real Estate into a regional powerhouse.

But his accomplishments made him an easy choice as winner of the Bravo! Entrepreneur Lifetime Achievement Award for 2007.

Kendall was selected through a rigorous screening process that included past winners, the Bravo! Entrepreneur Awards Committee and the Bravo! Entrepreneur Steering Committee. His vision in crafting a new type of real estate brokerage, initially to the ridicule, dismay and outright opposition of others in the industry, demonstrate his entrepreneurial qualities.

You’ll read about Kendall’s persistence, determination, vision and compassion in this special section, along with profiles of our other Bravo! Entrepreneur winners.

Bravo! Entrepreneur is a Northern Colorado Business Report program conducted in partnership with the Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce, the Greeley Chamber of Commerce, the Loveland Chamber of Commerce, the Northern Colorado Economic Development Corp. and Upstate Colorado Economic Development.

Presidents of these organizations appointed business leaders to the Awards Committee, whose work was assisted by dozens of past Bravo! Entrepreneur winners. This year’s Awards Committee included Tim Dow, Dow Law Firm, Fort Collins; Lucille Mantelli, Carestream Health, Windsor; Ron Schneider, retired banker, Loveland; Marilyn Foster, vice president of business development, Home State Bank, Fort Collins; Kelly Peters, city of Greeley; Don Churchill, retired CEO, Home State Bank, Loveland; and Bruce White, president, Conquest Oil Co., Greeley.

They were assisted by past Bravo! Entrepreneur winners, and by students at the University of Northern Colorado Monfort College of Business, who judge the Emerging Entrepreneur award.

Winners of Bravo! Entrepreneur awards are chosen from Fort Collins, Greeley, Loveland and Outlying Communities. Additionally, an Emerging Entrepreneur Award, a Lifetime Achievement Award and a Regional Spirit Award are also presented.

Here’s a rundown of all Bravo! Entrepreneur winners for 2007:

- Bravo! Entrepreneur Lifetime Achievement Award: Larry Kendall, The Group Inc.
- Bravo! Entrepreneur — Fort Collins: Rulon Stacy, Poudre Valley Health System
- Bravo! Entrepreneur — Greeley: Larry Seastrom, New Frontier Bank
- Bravo! Entrepreneur — Loveland: Linda Ligon, Interweave Press
- Bravo! Entrepreneur — Outlying Communities: Martin Lind, Water Valley
- Emerging Entrepreneur Award: Steve Byers, EnergyLogic Inc.
- Regional Spirit Award: Aims Community College
- Thank you to our many event partners and sponsors, including those chambers of commerce and economic-development agencies noted above. Thanks to Caldera Creative Services, Mountain Media, Simply Chocolate and to our own Jim Rath, who does such a marvelous job organizing our events.

Lastly, thanks to our many sponsors, including platinum sponsors Bank of Choice; Ehrhardt, Keeffe, Steiner and Hoffman; and Water Valley. Our reception sponsor was United Western Bank; our awards sponsor was CSU Office of Economic Development; and our dinner sponsor, McWhinney, Gold sponsors included Hewlett-Packard Co., Palmer Flowers and MediaTech Productions.

We also are grateful to our many table sponsors.

Finally, we hope you enjoy this special section on Bravo! Entrepreneur 2007. We’ll see you next year in Greeley!
FORT COLLINS — Before Harvey Nesbitt died in 2000, he recounted in a Business Report interview how Larry Kendall had changed the course of his career, and his life.

Nesbitt was not quite a cofounder of The Group Inc. Real Estate, the company that under Kendall’s leadership became the dominant residential brokerage force in the region. He had joined the Fort Collins company as a broker in its second year — 1977 — when the unorthodox business was just finding its way in the market.

“It wasn’t always easy, and sometimes it was pretty rocky,” Nesbitt said. “Everybody wanted to manage. Everybody wanted to pick out the color of the stationery, and nobody wanted to sell real estate.”

Nesbitt credited Kendall for keeping The Group’s loosely run ship together long enough for it to catch the wind.

“A lot of other brokers would not have had the persistence and determination to make a noble project like this work,” he said. “The secret of how this thing works comes down to our fearless leader."

Persistence, determination, vision and compassion — qualities that Kendall’s longtime associates cite as his most valuable characteristics — are also those that led judges to select him as the 2007 recipient of the Bravo! Entrepreneur Lifetime Achievement Award.

Kendall two years ago stepped down from his role as chairman of The Group, and while he still closely tracks the day-to-day progress of the company, he spends as much time traveling abroad, and on road trips to conduct sales and leadership training seminars under the “Ninja Selling” brand.

“In fact, over the years brokers by the thousands from throughout the world have made the pilgrimage to Fort Collins to learn the Ninja Selling secrets from the master,” Kendall said. “If we are, as we want to be, the No. 1 source for real estate information in our market, we’ve got to get the information out. Now, we’re putting prices on all of our signs.”

"The secret of how this thing works comes down to our fearless leader."

The late Harvey Nesbitt, longtime broker The Group Inc.
After Linda Ligon gave birth to her third child and decided to take some time away from teaching high school students at Fort Collins High School, she found she needed something to keep her busy.

“I decided I needed a home-based business, “ she said.

With that in mind, she coupled her knack for crafts with her interest in special interest publishing to create a regional newsletter focused on weaving. Little did Ligon know that the regional crafting newsletter that she started in 1975 would grow to become a $14 million company targeted for venture capital-backed buyout.

Interweave Press operated out of Ligon’s Loveland house for about three years. It became apparent, however, that as the number of employees grew so did the need to a business space away from home. “The more room you have the more things you decide to do,” she explained.

Interweave soon expanded into new subjects — spinning, hand weaving, herbs, needlework. Basically, anything related to crafts, cooking and gardening was fair game for Interweave. As the company expanded its focus in terms of subject, it also expanded in terms of medium. Interweave began publishing books.

In 2005, Montana publishing entrepreneur Clay Hall, with backing from Chicago and New York venture capitalists, purchased Interweave Press — wrapping into Aspire Media. The terms of the deal were not released. The previous year, Interweave had raked about $14 million in revenue.

Ligon said that the success and size of the company is very surprising to her. She was equally surprised to learn that she was a finalist for the 2007 Bravo! Entrepreneur Awards in the Loveland category. The business grew very organically.

Delivering Talent and Technology to Society

A research university delivers economic value to its communities by inventing technology and developing talent. At Colorado State University, the creation of three multidisciplinary Superclusters, a dramatic increase in invention disclosures and start-up companies, the announcement of a new online university, the creation of a regional economist position and the plan to evolve CSU-Extension toward lifelong learning innovation centers in partnership with their communities are all examples of CSU’s ability to deliver economic value.

Hunt Lambert
Associate Vice President of Economic Development

Office of Economic Development
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1051 Campus Delivery
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1051
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EnergyLogic rides wave of green building awareness

By Kristen Tatti
ktatti@ncbr.com

EnergyLogic Inc. principal Steve Byers saw earlier than most the growing need for sustainable practices.

In 1992, upon completing his service to the U.S. Air Force, Byers became an intern at Georgia-based Southface Energy Institute. The non-profit focuses on providing environmental education and outreach. Byers’ time at Southface gave him the experience and tools he needed to start his own venture.

Byers’ wife, Wynne Maggi, is a Berthoud native, so the couple decided to settle back into the small Northern Colorado town to start EnergySmiths, an energy rating firm with a focus on consulting with home builders in the region, in 2001.

The business grew quickly, riding a tidal wave of new residential construction along the Front Range. EnergyLogic provides consultation on methods and tools for reducing energy consumption and overall environmental impact. The company’s revenues more than doubled in three years, with almost $890,000 in 2006.

Byers found that there was a familiar face appearing at many of the bids he was trying to land for EnergySmiths. Robby Schwartz owned Denver-based energy ratings firm BuiltWright Inc. The two decided that it was in the best interest for the companies to join forces and in January 2006 the two merged to become EnergyLogic.

Today, the company operates three offices and employs 20 people. However, growth going forward is likely to be more measured and deliberate. The housing market has definitely cooled, slowing the growth of EnergyLogic’s core business.

“It’s definitely dropped off, but we are continuing to grow,” Byers said.

EnergyLogic, the 2007 Bravo! Emerging Entrepreneur, is truly a rising star. The company is preparing to launch several new business ventures that put it beyond the scope of consultant to residential home builders.

The company vision of “a future in which all homes have the least possible impact on the Earth” may need some adjustment as it offers its expertise to a new clientele.

“We are trying to form a commercial

2007 Bravo!
Entrepreneur —
Emerging
Steve Byers —
EnergyLogic

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That’s an art and a science all in its own. “There are more people who volunteer through their church than any other (group).” Schultz said. “We’re in kind of a funny business, because if you view churches as a market, that market really is not growing,” he said. “For us, as a business that helps churches, we need to keep finding new ways to help a stable customer base.”

Schultz’ answer has been to expand into new areas. Over the past 10 years, Group — in addition to increasing its staff from 200 to 330 and doubling its office space — has launched a network of women’s clubs operated within churches and acquired a California company called Simply Youth Ministry. But by far its largest expansion has been into church management. Group created Church Volunteer Central, now the largest association of volunteer managers in the world, and launched a Web-based church management software program. It even provides low-cost background checks for church volunteers.

“When you stop to think about it, the church is the largest user of volunteers in the country and in the world,” Schultz said. “There are more people who volunteer through their church than any other (group). That’s an art and a science all in its own.”

Group products help teach that science to churches. “We have lots of options on the table right now,” Lucio said. “I’m concentrating on finding the right combination of fast-food concept, franchising, and selling off some of the parts to a new company.”

That’s another thing entrepreneurs understand. “That’s what business is all about – nothing can stay the same,” he said. "I don’t want to retire and travel the world. "I don’t want to retire and travel the world. I want to see it happen," he said.

Exit strategy: Louis Lucio, founder of the chain of Armadillo restaurants, shown here in 1999 when he was named a Bravo! Entrepreneur, is looking forward to reorganizing the company before he retires.

DOING GOOD WORKS — Thom Schultz’s Group Publishing is regularly voted one of the best places to work in the region.

1999 WINNERS

Schultz still at head of class with Group

By Jessica Centers

What Thom Schultz started in 1974 as a single magazine for youth ministries had by 1998 grown into a multimillion dollar business publishing Christian educational materials. That was the year that Group Publishing received the first Bravo! Entrepreneur Award for Loveland.

Since then, Schultz has continued to grow Group Publishing by finding and filling the needs of churches. “We’re in kind of a funny business, because if you view churches as a market, that market really is not growing,” he said. “For us, as a business that helps churches, we need to keep finding new ways to help a stable customer base.”

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DOING GOOD WORKS — Thom Schultz’s Group Publishing is regularly voted one of the best places to work in the region.

1998 WINNERS
Walker Manufacturing still 100 percent family-owned

By Jane Albritton
news@ncbr.com

“We are interested in slow, steady growth,” said Dean Walker of Walker Manufacturing Co. “That’s how we maintain control of the company.”

Slow? Since members of the Walker family were recognized as Bravo! Entrepreneurs in 2000, the Timnath-based company has added 100,000 square feet of manufacturing space, more than 40 employees and two additional models of riding mowers to its line.

“Our Model-B was three years in production,” Walker explained. “It is a non-catchinger mower designed for the home owner.”

This fall, the Walkers introduced the Super-B, a bigger, faster commercial mower designed to compete in a turf-industry market dominated by mid-mount machines.

“Our deck is still in front,” Walker said. “We built 100 of the Super-Bs and have been field-testing them this spring and summer. We are conservative, and until you actually take that step to test your product, you can’t know where the bugs are.”

The Walkers have also seen growth in overseas markets.

“Having a worldwide presence, in Europe as well as in Australia and New Zealand, gives us some economic stability,” Walker said. “If the economy is weak here, it is likely to be strong in other parts of the world.”

There is also the matter of spreading out the risk of drought — no rain, no grass, no need to mow.

2000 WINNERS

Bravo! Entrepreneur, Outlying Communities: Bob, Max & Dean Walker, Walker Manufacturing Co., Fort Collins
Greeley: Bill Farr, Centennial Bank of the West
Fort Collins: Kim Jordan & Jeff Lebsch, New Belgium Brewing Co.
Lifetime Achievement Award: Ken Monfort, Greeley
Regional Spirit Award: Greeley
Independence Stampede, Greeley
Emerging Entrepreneur Award: Tim Gan, OpenLRF.com, Fort Collins

2001 WINNERS

Bravo! Entrepreneur, Fort Collins: Spiro Palmer, Palmer Gardens
Greeley: Jerry Morgensen, Hensel Phelps Construction Co.
Loveland: Chad & Troy McWhinney, McWhinney Enterprises
Outlying Communities: Joe & Bob Raith, Morning Fresh Farms, Platteville
Lifetime Achievement Award: Tom Gleason, First National Bank, Fort Collins & Loveland
Regional Spirit Award: State Farm Insurance Co., Greeley
Emerging Entrepreneur Award: Jeff Whitam, Encorp Inc., Windsor

Walker Manufacturing produced its first prototype riding mower in 1977 with Max Walker and his wife Martha at the helm. These days, son Dean is in charge of product development and manufacturing operations while his brother Bob oversees business and marketing. And year by year, a new generation of Walkers joins the company’s ranks.

“Our parents are now 84 years old,” Dean Walker said. “They still live above the office and have a wonderful opportunity to be still involved in the business.”

By Luanne Kadlub
news@ncbr.com

Spiro Palmer, named Bravo Entrepreneur for Fort Collins in 2001, is not one to sit back and rest on his laurels — though he certainly has enough to make for a cushy seat.

In 2005 he was the recipient of the prestigious Retail Florist of the Year Award given by the national Wholesale Florist & Supplier Association. Palmer Flowers has also been named Best Place to Work and Best Corporate Citizen as well as runner-up for Small Business of the Year in 2004 by the Fort Collins Coloradoan.

So what could he do for an encore? How about turning Palmer Properties into a successful family operation with his sons? Aki Palmer, an agent with Realtec Inc., handles the leasing while Jimmy Palmer, a recent graduate of the construction management program at the University of Denver, oversees construction projects. Both work the financing side as well.

In the last six years Palmer Properties has acquired and sold more than 200,000 square feet of commercial space, including the First Community Bank Plaza on JFK Parkway, just east of Palmer Flowers and Design Center.

Palmer Properties also recently closed on the historic Avery Block in Old Town Fort Collins.

“We’re pretty excited to take the company to the next level,” Spiro Palmer said. “We will do more buildings, more developments, more partnerships. We have a couple, three things in the pipeline.”

Business has been changing in the floral department as well. Palmer’s Floral School, operated by Spiro’s wife Angela, opened in 2001 and offers four 30-hour classes toward a certificate in floral design. The school has a 90 percent placement rate with students working up and down the Front Range, Spiro Palmer said.

And the floral shop still offers the gorgeous arrangements Palmer Flowers is known for, but now customers can also purchase flowers at wholesale prices.
Salazar: Man with van becomes man with plan

By Luanne Kadub
news@ncbr.com

Israel “Izzy” Salazar always dreamed big. When he co-founded TSN Inc. in 1990 with Ted Nelson, it was a three-person operation delivering janitorial and cleaning supplies out of an Econoline van.

By 2002, Salazar and TSN had grown into the neighborhood of $100 million in sales, and received the Bravo! Entrepreneur Award for outlying communities.

Fast forward to 2004, TSN had 234 employees in facilities in both Frederick and Richmond, Ind., delivering anything and everything that didn’t create income to convenience and grocery store — cleaning supplies, paper products, rugs, squeegees, even nacho trays. Salazar held a 72 percent stake in the company, which still counts Wal-Mart, Sam’s Club and 45,000 convenience stores nationwide among its clients.

That same year, London-based Bunzl Plc., attracted by TSN’s 2003 sales of $130 million, made an offer too good to turn down — between $50 million and $100 million.

Later, the company added the manufacture of custom rescue vehicles and robotic command lights to its operations.

The 68-year-old Izzy still stays involved, Roger said. He does a lot of research and development, recently designing a new depth gauge for chainsaws that firefighters use to cut open roofs. He also helps make the manufacturing process more efficient through changes in product flow, Roger said.

Right now, Super Vac operates out of four buildings on seven acres on East 11th Avenue in Loveland, where it has been a mainstay since its founding, plus two rented buildings across the street. By earlier this year, the company purchased 80 acres in Wellington for expansion some time in the next five years.

In 2003, Super Vac employed about 100 people. Since then, the business has added two divisions and is up to about 150 employees.

Three years ago, the company added a graphics division that creates custom reflective stripes for police, fire and emergency rescue vehicles, according to Roger.

Wardes ride wave of future

By Luanne Kadub
news@ncbr.com

A growing business population up and down the Front Range continues to mean good business for Northern Colorado Paper. In addition to showroom/distribution centers in Greeley — its headquarters — and Pueblo, there are plans for another in Denver.

Founded in 1978 by Tim and Sally Warde, recipients of the 2004 Bravo! Entrepreneur Award for Greeley, Northern Colorado Paper supplies businesses throughout the region — and the nation — with everything from toilet tissue and trashcan liners to food service packaging and cleaning supplies. They handle more than 10,000 items, to be exact.

The Wardes are still hard at work growing their business. “We’ve been shooting for and achieving 10 percent growth per year,” said Tim Warde. Those mathematically inclined will quickly discern that means NCP doubles its sales volume every 10 years. Increasing fuel costs, however, have thrown a monkey wrench into operations, albeit one with a solution. Frequent deliveries in and around Denver — and associated fillups at the fuel pump — has Warde actively looking for warehouse space in the metro area.

“We’ve got a plan to have this happen in the next year,” he said.

High fuel prices aside, it makes sense to have a Denver distribution center to serve the growing metro clientele.

“This whole area is growing and Center- ra/Loveland has just exploded. That’s good for business,” Warde said.

So good, in fact, that he has added three reps in the last couple years. Warde also has taken a lead role in providing green products to his customers.

“It’s getting bigger and bigger. It’s the future and we want to stay on top of it,” he said. The Wardes continue to be active community participants and donors to organizations including United Way, the University of Northern Colorado, Colorado State University and Boy Scouts.

2002 WINNERS

Bravo! Entrepreneur, Outlying Communities: Israel “Izzy” Salazar, TSN Inc., Frederick

Greeley: Ruben & Scott Ehrlich, Ehrlich Motors

Loveland: Jack Devereaux, Home State Bank

Fort Collins: David & Jim Neenan, The Neenan Co.

Lifetime Achievement Award: Bob Tooton, Phelps-Tooton Inc., Greeley

Regional Spirit Award: Long’s Peak Council of the Boy Scouts

Emerging Entrepreneur Award: Maury Dabie, MediaTech Productions, Fort Collins

REAL ESTATE MOOGIL — Izzy Salazar has become an active real estate investor since retiring from his firm, TSN Inc., in 2004.

2003 WINNERS


Greeley: Tom Roche, Roche Constructors Inc.

Fort Collins: William Ward, Front Range Internet

Outlying Communities: Tom Gray, Gray Oil Co. Inc., Fort Lupton

Lifetime Achievement Award: Kathryn Hach-Darrow, Hach Co., Loveland

Regional Spirit Award: The Bohemian Foundation, Fort Collins

Emerging Entrepreneur Award: Tom and Kristi Johnson, Bingham Hill Cheese Co., Fort Collins

2004 WINNERS

Bravo! Entrepreneur, Greeley: Tim and Sally Warde, Northern Colorado Paper Inc.

Loveland: Mark Burke, Burke Cleaners and Mister Neat’s Formalwear

Fort Collins: David Bethune, Atrix Laboratories Inc.

Outlying Communities: Mark Hopkins, Peak Industries Inc., Frederick

Lifetime Achievement Award: Bill Neal, Wheeler Commercial Property Services, Inc., Fort Collins

Leo Schuster, Progressive Living Structures, Loveland

Regional Spirit Award: Monfort Family Foundation

Emerging Entrepreneur Award: Bruce Gold- en, Bernard E. Rollin & Ralph V. Switzer Jr., Optibrand Ltd. LLC, Fort Collins

BRAD WARDE FILE PHOTO

Sherry Slazar has become an active real estate investor since retiring from his firm, TSN Inc., in 2004.
Donnan turns into angel in life after Factual Data

By Luanne Kadlub
news@ncbr.com

Jerry Donnan, 2005 recipient of the Bravo! Entrepreneur Award for Loveland, said he’s busier now in retirement than when he was chairman and CEO of the mortgage credit services firm he co-founded in 1985 with his wife, Marcia.

Begun as Factual Data Corp., the firm was renamed Kroll Factual Data in 2003 when Kroll Inc., a leading risk consulting company, acquired it for $115 million. Donnan stayed on board until the end of that year, leaving his sons, James and Russ, in charge as president and IT director respectively.

In 2004, Marsh & McLennan Cos. Inc., a global advice and solutions provider in risk, strategy and human capital, acquired Kroll Inc. as part of a $1.9 billion all-cash transaction.

Donnan, however, hasn’t been spending retirement in a rocking chair. He and his wife formed the Donnan Charitable Foundation, which supports the needs of children, including Project Self-Sufficiency and Boys and Girls Clubs.

He’s put his experience to work as an angel — investor, that is — through Donnan Ltd., which invests in startup and existing companies. Donnan Ltd. also is involved in commercial projects, including an office building at Centerra, though Donnan chose not to elaborate further.

And he is having “a couple” hangars/office buildings built at the Fort Collins-Loveland Airport to house his private aircraft, a Cessna SR 22 and a new light jet still on order. He plans to lease the office space.

Donnan often is in the pilot’s seat when he and his wife opt to get away for a few days or a few weeks. They’ve enjoyed a two-week Alaskan cruise and often scOOT over to San Diego and Las Vegas for a change of pace.

But there’s something about that day-to-day work grind, Donnan said wistfully. “I miss it.”

Premier Colorado continues working together for NoCo

By Jessica Centers
news@ncbr.com

In 2005, Northern Colorado’s two main economic development organizations decided to take a break from competing over business prospects and try working together instead.

Last October, Larimer County’s Northern Colorado Economic Development Corp. and Weld County’s Upstate Colorado Economic Development jointly debuted a new brand called Premier Colorado at a business recruiting trip to Atlanta. That successful premier — and the vision that inspired it — resulted in Premier Colorado receiving the Bravo! Entrepreneur Regional Spirit Award in 2006.

One year later, Premier Colorado and the philosophy behind it are still going strong. Larry Burkhardt, president of Upstate Colorado, says the two organizations are now collaborating with the state, as well as the cities of Greeley, Loveland and Fort Collins, the work-force development cluster that markets to and provides commercialization support for the emerging clean-energy industry.

“Again, we are part of a larger group of public and private sector partners there to advance the Premier Colorado area,” Burkhardt said.

Meanwhile, he and Maury Dobbie, chairwoman of the NCEDC, have started discussing how they can work together on work-force development issues.

“There’s every reason to be regional in our scope,” Burkhardt said. “It’s to both of our advantages.”
WINDSOR — In the 1960s and ’70s, Karla and Ted Lind watched parts of the plan for Water Valley hatch in conversations around the dinner table at their farmhouse south of Windsor.

“Martin was always, always trying to come up with some other way to use this ground other than farming it,” Karla Lind said of her precocious son. “He had all sorts of ideas, none of them having anything to do with farming.”

Three decades later, Water Valley is regarded both locally and outside the region as one of the most carefully planned mixed-use developments anywhere in Colorado. It is also part of what makes Lind the 2007 Bravo! Entrepreneur Award winner for outlying communities.

“She’s right,” Lind said about his mother. “I wanted to do anything but go back and forth with a tractor. We thought about fish farms. We talked about apple orchards.”

Through the 1980s, Lind watched other land developers at work, building tract neighborhoods on Weld County farm ground. He took lessons from each. Over
AIMS: A community college with community in mind

By Noah Guillaume
nguillaume@ncbr.com

GREELEY – When Aims Community College was founded in 1967, it started with a promise to provide an affordable education to students in central Weld County.

Little has changed in 40 years except for Aims’ growing commitment to students throughout Northern Colorado as opposed to just Weld County.

Aims has kept its promise of affordable education and made it easier for students to take classes by opening new campuses in Fort Lupton and Loveland. The college also keeps a close watch on what’s happening around the area in terms of community growth and employment.

“We concentrate on a regional approach within a 50-mile radius,” said Marsi Liddell, president of Aims Community College.

What this means for students is more convenient locations and a curriculum that reflects and supports the employment trends in the region.

For its commitment to providing affordable training courses to students and a reliable pool of educated workers for Northern Colorado businesses Aims Community College is the recipient of the Northern Colorado Business Report’s Regional Spirit Award 2007.

In response to the growing shortage of nurses throughout the United States, Aims administrators talked to local hospitals to determine labor needs and made sure the nursing courses Aims offers match up with the needs at area hospitals.

“We try to be proactive instead of reactive,” said Liddell.

That proactive approach has its benefits. Students now have a choice of over 120 programs and 2,000 courses, and Aims is just one of two community colleges in the state that grew in enrollment, including a small but still growing enrollment of international students taking online coursework.

“I think programs that are attractive to students will bring students in,” said Liddell.

Having the second lowest tuition for a community college in the state probably helps, too.

Full classes and a full curriculum do not mean Aims is without struggle. With just 19 cents for every education dollar going to community colleges there is the challenge of having enough resources to accommodate the demand by students, Liddell said. Funding shortfalls have led to a waiting list of multiple years for some programs.

To address this issue Aims has secured land for a new campus along the Interstate-25 corridor in Berthoud. Expected to open in three to five years, the new campus will serve the Johnstown, Milliken, Berthoud, Mead and Loveland communities. Aims also is looking to add classes that would let students work with fuel-cell and hybrid vehicle technologies — classes with impacts well beyond Northern Colorado’s boundaries.
Seastrom takes New Frontier to top of banking list

“Hire great people who work hard and are dedicated to great customer service.”

Larry Seastrom, president and CEO, New Frontier Bank

By Kate Hawthorne
khawthorne@ncbr.com

GREELEY — As the Northern Colorado Business Report staff was preparing for the very first Bravo! Entrepreneur Awards in 1998, Larry Seastrom was preparing an application for a brand-new bank in Greeley.

It was to be called Rocky Mountain Bank, but when the charter came before the Colorado Division of Banking, that had been changed to New Frontier Bank.

Bankers at some of the 22 other Greeley institutions predicted Seastrom, his 180 investors and seven employees would have a hard time attracting customers, even with $6 million capitalization.

Then the market boomed along with the state economy, national banks bought up a number of local competitors, and New Frontier appeared for the first time on the state’s Mercury 100 list of the region’s fastest growing companies in 2001. Its revenues grew 242 percent between 1999 and 2000 and its employees to 49.

Now the latest figures from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. show that, as of June 30, New Frontier’s three branches held the largest share of the deposit market in Larimer and Weld counties — $1.36 billion — up 75 percent over 2006.

For presiding over this phenomenal growth, Seastrom has been named the Bravo! Entrepreneur for Greeley this year.

“We have a full-time receptionist in the lobby who greets and welcomes every customer,” he said. “There are 12 full-time people answering the phones, and we have no plans to add an automated system. People want to talk to real people.”

New Frontier also has no plans for adding branches beyond those in Greeley, Windsor and Longmont. Its workforce of 195 has been remarkably stable, and Seastrom is proud of maintaining an environment where “everyone is treated exactly the same.”

“We take our jobs seriously, but we don’t take ourselves seriously,” he said.

It helps to bring experience to the table. Seastrom was a 17-year veteran of the banking industry when he started New Frontier.

He moved to Colorado from Kansas in 1981 to work at the Bank of Colorado (then Bank of Windsor), then Union Colony Bank, followed by the Bank of Greeley and finally Eaton Bank, where he helped establish the branch on 47th Avenue.

It also helps to have a diverse loan portfolio, Seastrom said. With 45 percent of its loans in agriculture, 30 percent in real estate, 20 percent in construction and only 5 percent in commercial lending, the bank has recently benefited from high commodity prices while avoiding mortgage-lending turmoil.

But the philosophy that people bank with people, not brands, is the core of New Frontier’s success, in Seastrom’s view.

“Hire great people who work hard and are dedicated to great customer service.”

Larry Seatrom, president and CEO, New Frontier Bank

2007 Bravo! Entrepreneur — Greeley
Larry Seastrom — New Frontier Bank

Past winners — Greeley
2006 Roger Knoph, Envirotech Services Inc.
2005 Mark Kendall, Kendall Printing Co.
2004 Tim and Sally Warde, Northern Colorado Paper Inc.
2003 Tom Roche, Roche Constructors Inc.
2002 Ruben & Scott Ehrlich, Ehrlich Motors
2001 Jerry Mengensen, Hensel Phelps Construction Co.
2000 Bill Farr, Centennial Bank of the West
1999 John Todd, Todd’s
1998 Darrell McAllister, 1st Choice Bank
FORT COLLINS – For Rulon Stacey — as with all good leaders — it was a matter of being the right person in the right place at the right time.

By 1996, Poudre Valley Hospital System had seen a new CEO come and go nearly every year for the previous four years. Poised for huge change, PVHS was hungry for a leader who could put behind its years of turmoil and lead it into a brighter future.

The stage was set for the modest man from Provo, Utah, to take the reins and get the horse back on the track.

“I think the board (of directors) in ’96 knew the right path (and) sometimes the right path takes some political heat, but they’ve been very supportive,” said Stacey, president and CEO of PVHS for the last 11 years. “I couldn’t have done it without them but they probably could have done it without me.”

Stacey, 47, has been guiding PVHS with a steady hand through enormous growth in employees, services and facilities, including the opening of a brand-new hospital, Medical Center of the Rockies, earlier this year.

Those accomplishments have earned him the Northern Colorado Business Report’s Bravo! Fort Collins Entrepreneur of the Year Award for 2007.

For Stacey, his years with PVHS have been a gratifying professional journey. “It has been an extraordinary experience to be here when that all happened,” he said. “The board of directors knew what had to happen. (PVHS) was ready to explode and they gave me the task of leading it.”

But it wasn’t just presiding over the addition of new facilities to the PVHS network. Along the way, the hospital system has won award after award for its care, competitive prices and services. Stacey gives credit to a community that loves its hospital and vice versa.

See FORT COLLINS, 15B
“The only reason, honestly, that we’re in business is to provide world-class health care.”

Rulon Stacey, president and CEO
Poudre Valley Health System

FORT COLLINS, from 14B

“I think it’s our commitment to the community,” he said. “We are a locally owned organization so it brings a focus on the community and we don’t have to send money to other places. It allows us to focus on quality and not money and when you do that, good things happen.”

Terry McNeal, a broker associate at The Group Inc. Real Estate who nominated Stacey along with her fellow associate, Ralph Waldo, said she did so because of Stacey’s commitment to the community. “He has added much needed stability to a position that was once a revolving door,” McNeal said. “His commitment to excellence is never-ending and has been proven by the numerous awards mentioned in the nomination.”

Those awards include the 1999 Robert S. Hudgens Award from the American College of Healthcare Executives as “Young Healthcare Executive of the Year.”

For Stacey, it’s all about helping provide PVHS’s 3,200 employees with a great place to work and help people in need. “The only reason, honestly, that we’re in business is to promote world-class health care,” he said.

LOVELAND, from 4B

“I didn’t follow the conventions,” Ligon said. “I didn’t have the business skills or a business plan.”

Ligon said the secret to her success was that she hired people to do the things she didn’t know how to do — sales being the first. Now, Ligon serves as the creative director for Interweave, which allows her to get her hands in all of her favorite parts of the publishing industry — the parts that inspired her to start Interweave in the first place.

Ligon is quick to usher praises away from herself and onto the Interweave staff and management, but Aspire Media’s Hall feels that the success of the company really originates with her. “It’s her leadership that’s done it,” he said. “She is a one-of-a-kind person.”

Hall has been in publishing for more than 30 years. He knows that Ligon is a shining star in the industry and feels proud to know her and work with her. “It’s one of the highlights of my career,” he said.

Ligon said that decision to sell to Aspire was made because the company was in a position of strength at the time and that McNeal said. “With a bunch of streets pushed into a cornfield,” as Lind often says about tract development.

“The very word ‘developer’ derives a raised eyebrow,” Lind said. “So many of them take shortcuts, and don’t follow through in a responsible way. The reputation of this industry is marred by the predecessors who took the shortcuts.”

Before getting into the land-development business, Lind and his former partner, ex-Denver Bronco Steve Watson, got into the sand-and-gravel business. Poudre Tech Aggregates Inc. rearranged the landscape of Windsor’s southern flank in a way that made it the perfect canvas for the artistry that many people say resulted in Water Valley. Five manmade lakes totaling 300 acres — “my favorite kind of open space,” as Lind says — wrap around the careful arrangement of Pelican Lakes Golf Course and the nearby neighborhoods. Lind and Watson formed Trollico Inc., the umbrella company for development of Water Valley and subsequent projects.

“It’s very resourceful and very creative, and has always been an innovator,” Watson said about Lind in a 2001 interview. “For me, it was a real learning experience. It was exciting.”

The Lind-Watson partnership dissolved in 2001 with Watson returning to his first love, football, as a member of the Broncos coaching staff. Lind bought out Watson’s interest, and pursued other endeavors. Water Valley South, and its Pelican Falls nine-hole golf addition, took shape. Lind and partners secured a Central Hockey League franchise for the hugely successful Colorado Eagles, a team that consistently sells out the Budweiser Events Center.

Lind’s far-reaching plans encompass Eagle Crossing Business Park, stretching eastward from The Ranch and the Budweiser Events Center, and new commercial development plans for Fort Collins-Loveland-Platteville.”

“IT would be something vastly different than any of the others,” Lind said. “But anybody who knows me knows that I’m the eternal optimist. I’m also a realist,” he said. “This oversupply is going to be very hard on a lot of people, and it will be no different for us than anybody else. The only difference is that we have a little wider wheelbase.”

Past winners — Fort Collins

2006 Terry GraHotz, DraHotz Commercial LLC
2005 Lon Schlotter, Colorado CustomWare Inc.
2004 David Bethune, Atrix Laboratories Inc.
2001 Spino Palmer, Palmer Gardens
2000 Kim Jordan & Jeff Lebesch, New Belgium Brewing Co.
1998 Kent and Gloria Sampson, Value Plastics Inc.

Past winners — Outlying communities

2006 Andy and Bob Brown, Harsh International Inc.
2005 Tom Bear and Gary Gorschuk, Meadowlark Optics
2004 Mark Hopkins, Peak Industries Inc., Frederick
2003 Tom Gray, Gray Oil Co. Inc., Fort Lupton
2002 Israel “Izy” Salazar, TSN Inc., Frederick
2001 Joe & Bob Raith, Morning Fresh Farms, Platteville
2000 Bob, Max & Dean Walker, Walker Manufacturing Co., Fort Collins
1999 Louis Lucio, ArmorAll, LaSalle
1998 Bill Coleman, Colorado Greenhouse Holdings Inc., Fort Lupton

Outlying, from 11B

the years a vision for Water Valley, a residential development unlike any other in the vicinity, began to emerge. It would be something vastly different than “a bunch of streets pushed into a cornfield,” as Lind often says about tract development.

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EMERGING, from 6B

The company is also looking to expand its reach into the existing home market. As Byers put it, there are a lot more existing homes than new ones. The growth into these new markets means dealing with different customers, but that is not a deterrent. Maggi describes herself and Byers as risk-takers, and Byers said that not all of the company’s ventures have panned out.

“We tried a remote office, and it went badly,” Byers said. The “try-and-fail” approach has been a great tool for EnergyLogic, so much so that the company is growing its consulting arm by teaching other energy rating firms the tricks of the trade. Byers said that by consulting with other firms throughout the country, EnergyLogic is able to spread its message without having to grow geographically.

Past winners — Emerging entrepreneur

2006 Kevin Brinkman — Brinkman Partners
2005 Paul and Nenita Pelligino — NitaCrisp Crackers
2003 Tom and Kristi Johnson — Bingham Cracker Co., Fort Collins
2002 Maury Dobbs — MediaTech Productions, Fort Collins
2001 Jeff Whitham — Encorp Inc., Windsor
2000 Tim Gam — OpenCT.com, Fort Collins
1999 Eastman Kodak Co., Windsor
1998 Hewlett-Packard Co., Fort Collins

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Darrell McAllister
CEO and Chairman of the Board
Bravo Entrepreneur Award Recipient