

# WMIA honors 1999 Innovator, Educator and Exporter of the Year

The 1999 WMIA Innovator, Educator and Exporter of the Year Award winners include Siewert Cabinet & Fixture Manufacturing, Innovator; Design Fabricators, Inc., Exporter; and Precision Wood Products, Educator.

## Innovator

Based in Minneapolis, Minn., Innovator of the Year, Siewert Cabinet & Fixture Manufacturing, is an American success story. Started in the family garage by Wayne Siewert in 1965, the company dedicated itself to commercial store fixtures and architectural millwork manufacturing in the late 1970s. The firm grew slowly but steadily, establishing a local reputation for fine craftsmanship and quality products.

Son, Rick Siewert, who joined the firm full time in 1985, became the driving force behind the company's accelerated growth, moving the company to larger quarters in 1989 to accommodate the increasing workload. In 1995 he assumed full management responsibilities and embarked on a program of rapid expansion, which included building a new 30,000-sq. ft. facility and the purchase of more than \$300,000 worth of new automated equipment in 1998.

## Exporter

Lafayette, Colo.-based Exporter of the Year, Design Fabricators, Inc. is one of the nation's fastest growing manufacturers of store fixtures and commercial furniture. With sales in excess of \$26 million, the company has grown steadily since opening its doors in 1986 as a manufacturer of mall amenities such as food court furniture and vending carts.

In 1988 the company decided to branch out into store fixtures and

custom millwork and in 1989 began its focus on rollout accounts. Expansion-oriented retailers became the firm's ticket to success. Design Fabricators' current client base includes leading brands such as the Body Shop, Starbucks Coffee, Barnes & Noble Booksellers and others.

## Educator

While the 1999 WMIA Educator of the Year, Hartford Connecticut-based Precision Wood Products, profitably manufactures store fixtures and casegoods, its most important product is well-trained, skilled woodworkers.

The company is the result of a collaboration between Co-Opportunity, a Hartford-based not-for-profit firm involved in housing and housing construction training and Asian Neighborhood Design of West Oakland, Calif.

The concept is simple. Take at-risk youths and welfare recipients, give them on-the-job training, sell the products to fund training for additional employees and graduate successful employees into the work force.

To date, more than 19 employees have been placed with private businesses and at Precision Wood Products.

Currently the program has 25 full-time employees at different levels of training. In addition to Auto Cad and CNC machining instruction, the curriculum includes assembly techniques and woodworking basics. In many cases, employees also finish requirements for their GED. ■

For more information about these awards, or to nominate a company, call the WMIA at (401) 931-8100.



WMIA marketing committee chairman Giordano Checchi, left, presents the 1999 Innovator of the Year Award to Rick Siewert of Siewert Cabinets & Fixture Manufacturing.



Bill Petrino, left, and Matt Sansen, center, of Precision Wood Products, accept the 1999 Educator of the Year Award from Tim Cowan.



Mike Mendenhall (left) presents the 1999 WMIA Exporter of the Year Award to Design Fabricators, Inc., Marc Sagrillo and Mark Bennett.