

CHAMBER HONORS OUTSTANDING FIRMS AND VOLUNTEERS

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William E. Leer Construction Co., The Bee and Bette Belle Smith were honored Thursday night by the Modesto **Chamber** of Commerce.

For its efforts in renovating old buildings in downtown Modesto, the William E. Leer Construction Co. was named Small Business of the Year. William, Rae and David Leer accepted the award at a banquet at the DoubleTree Hotel. The annual awards dinner was attended by more than 650 **chamber** members. The Leer family recently invested \$500,000 in a circa-1930 building at Seventh and I streets. The structure, now named the Leer Building, is home to eight tenants, including the Leer Corp.

The Leers now are putting \$600,000 into another vintage downtown building, this one at 1111 J St. It will house up to 18 offices and feature an atrium with skylights.

The Bee received the **chamber's** first-ever Business Hall of Fame Award. The **honor** previously was called Business of the Year.

The newspaper was recognized for its local news coverage and support of more than 100 local nonprofit organizations.

Two of The Bee's projects, Kid's Day and Book of Dreams, promote and coordinate community giving to individuals in need.

Another new award, the Robert J. Cardoza Award for citizen of the year, was given to Bette Belle Smith of US Bank.

Joan Cardoza, wife of the late Robert J. Cardoza, and his daughter, Carrie Cardoza Bordona, made the presentation.

Cardoza Bordona spoke of Smith's work with numerous local charities and organizations. She also noted Smith being feted in October 2000 on Capitol Hill.

"At age 79, she was named California's Outstanding Older Worker and represented the state at a conference in Washington, D.C.," Cardoza Bordona said.

Also honored at Thursday's event:

* Nonprofit of the Year -- Carole Sund/Carrington Memorial Reward Foundation for its mission of helping law enforcement locate missing people.

* Excellence in Education -- Valley Business High School for providing business education to high school students.

* Distinguished Service Award -- Gene Carrillo of American Express Financial Advisors for leading the **chamber's** education committee.

* **Chamber** Member of the Year -- Save Mart Supermarkets for encouraging its entire staff to volunteer time and talent to the **chamber**.

* Vera Girolami Ambassador of the Year -- Patrick McKee of McKee Co. for calling on 127 members while working on member retention for the **chamber**.

* Ted Shields Welcome Team Member of the Year -- Carolyn Bovee of C&W Development for attending 73 of the 106 **chamber** ribbon cuttings.