

INDIANA SMALL BUSINESSES GET RECOGNITION

By Rebecca Patrick

A custom home builder and a wellness retailer recently shared top honors as the Indiana Chamber of Commerce named Duke Homes of Bargersville and The Elderberry Co. of New Albany its 2025 Small Businesses of the Year.

The award and recognition of three finalists were presented at a luncheon in Indianapolis that was part of the Indiana Chamber’s Chamber Day at the Statehouse event, held in partnership with the Indiana Chamber Executives Association. The full-day program brought together more than 300 employers and leaders from 45 local chambers of commerce across the state to connect with lawmakers on public policies impacting their local businesses and workforce.

“Small businesses are so vital to the state’s economic prosperity and make our local communities what they are. It’s why the Indiana Chamber is dedicated to doing all it can to champion this important sector,” says Vanessa Green Sindors, Indiana Chamber president and CEO.

“We were overwhelmed by the number of quality award nominations – over 40 in total – that came in from state legislators, local chambers of commerce and businesses across Indiana. We are thrilled to recognize the top honorees and applaud all the successful Hoosier small businesses in every industry and region.”

Companies with 100 or fewer employees were eligible for consideration for the 2025 Small Business of the Year award.

Nominations were judged in four categories: leadership and community, chamber involvement, business success and overall deservedness. The nominees were scored in each category, with the highest scorers being the winners, finalists and semi-finalists.

State Rep. Michelle Davis (R-Whiteland) nominated Duke Homes. Led by founder Mike Duke, the company prides itself on crafting timeless spaces and places that transform families and communities. It started with one employee 39 years ago and has since grown to 21 team members. One of the top custom builders in the Indianapolis area, the selection committee “was impressed with Duke Homes’ dedication to employees, continued revenue growth as well as stellar service to its local community.”

Less than a decade ago, Jenny Watson’s intention with making homemade elderberry syrup was to provide her young son with a health boost. The stay-at-home mom shared her mixture with friends, then on social media and ultimately opened a storefront in New Albany and started selling online. Today, The Elderberry Co. employs 16, offers 40 wellness/self-care products and is a multimillion-dollar business. The selection committee “loved the inspiring and evolving entrepreneurial path taken by Watson, the commitment to employees and how the company cherishes its community.”

Small Business of the Year finalists and semi-finalists were also named. The three finalists:

- Connor Painting of Indianapolis – An industrial painting and floor coatings company started in 1979, it employs 50 and is led today by Janmarie Connor. Of note: The

business’ longevity and success are due in part to pivoting to expand its services.

- Nuway Construction of Goshen – A general contracting and real estate development firm founded in 1975, it was nominated by the Goshen Chamber of Commerce. Now co-owned by Andy Nesbitt and Jan Oostland, it is 27 employees strong. A focus on volunteerism led to an amazing 1,250 employee hours in the community in 2024.
- O’Mara Foods of Greensburg – A fourth-generation food wholesaler with nine employees, it is led by Blake O’Mara. The company impressed with its tremendous level of community involvement and lengthy success. It was founded in 1936.

Rounding out the honors were five Small Business of the Year semi-finalists: A Total Solution CPA & Consulting Services from Indianapolis, Master Rental in Bloomington, AAA Concrete Services of New Albany, Lithotone from Elkhart and Braden Business Systems in Fishers.

Chamber Day at the Statehouse was presented by Thompson Thrift. The luncheon was sponsored by Charter Spectrum TV/Internet/Voice, with additional Chamber Day diamond sponsors being AT&T Indiana, Eli Lilly and Company and Google.

Bank of America was the gold sponsor. Silver sponsors were Apex Clean Energy; Applied Research Institute, Inc.; Boston Scientific; Delta Dental of Indiana; French Lick Resort; Ice Miller LLP; IGT Indiana; Indiana American Water; Indiana State University; Meijer, Inc.; National Grid Renewables; Smithville and TRISTAR.



Too close to call: Two companies took home the 2025 Small Business of the Year honors, (left) Duke Homes of Bargersville and The Elderberry Co. of New Albany.