

National Restaurant Association Announces Winners of 10th Annual Restaurant Neighbor Award for Commitment to Community Service

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The winners are: Chili's Grill & Bar, headquartered in Dallas, in the large business category, Keystone Apple in Mechanicsburg, Pa., in the mid-size business category, Barry's Cafe in Raleigh, N.C., in the small business category, and Valerie Daniels-Carter, President and CEO of Milwaukee-based V&J Holding Companies Inc., in the Cornerstone Humanitarian category.

"Being in the hospitality business and serving the communities in which they live and work is a natural extension of that hospitality for the nation's 945,000 restaurants," said National Restaurant Association President and CEO Dawn Sweeney. "Being a good neighbor is the core of good business, and restaurants are making a difference across America through food donations, disaster relief, health-related causes, youth-development programs and other charitable activities. We are proud to recognize these outstanding restaurants and community leaders with our Restaurant Neighbor Award."

The national winners of the 2008 Restaurant Neighbor Award are:

Large Business: Chili's Grill & Bar, headquartered in Dallas

Chili's Grill & Bar has one of the most successful fundraising programs in the industry - the Create-A-Pepper campaign. Held each September, Chili's management and staff encourage guests to donate \$1 or more for the opportunity to customize a chili pepper coloring sheet to benefit St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Over the past five years, the campaign has raised an astounding \$18.7 million. In honor of the unique partnership, a new state-of-the-art building at St. Jude's was named the Chili's Care Center in 2007.

Mid-Size Business: Keystone Apple in Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Keystone Apple, which operates eight Applebee's franchises in Central Pennsylvania, created its "A-Team" to coordinate a wide variety of charitable events that have made a strong impression on its community, from taking the Special Olympics Eskimo Plunge to donating school supplies and stuffing backpacks for the Jim McMinn Backpack Program. Other A-Team events include raising \$4,300 for the Humane Society's Dog Days of Summer program, participating in the Special Olympics Area M Sports Classic, and helping raise \$3,500 at the Veterans Day RJ Harris Breakfast to support the Military of the Purple Heart organization. Since its inception in 2007, the A-Team has inspired restaurant staff to log 1,400 volunteer hours to support dozens of community events.

Small Business: Barry's Cafe in Raleigh, N.C.

Owner of Barry's Cafe Barry Doyle was inspired by the tireless efforts of local firefighters and police officers, and when an ice storm hit Raleigh, Doyle and his crew were the first to arrive on the scene with hot coffee for the first responders managing the crisis. The restaurant created the "Feed the Firefighters Foundation" to support its work and has been supplying no-cost emergency foodservice to 75 fire stations in Wake County for 10 years, last year serving nearly 1,800 meals from its 31-foot mobile unit. Barry's Cafe has been called in during other storms to feed elderly without power, volunteers looking for someone missing, and National Guardsmen helping during the storm.

Cornerstone Humanitarian: Valerie Daniels-Carter, V&J Holding Companies Inc., in Milwaukee

Owner of a quickservice restaurant company operating 130 restaurants, Valerie Daniels-Carter is the largest multi-brand African-American franchise operator in the United States. In the U.S. and Africa, she has been involved in many philanthropic initiatives, including educational and economic empowerment programs. Developed in the memory of her mother and husband, Daniels-Carter spearheaded the Mother Kathryn Daniels Youth Center that houses Wisconsin's largest Boys and Girls Club, two schools, a family service center, social and meeting facilities. In Africa, she created an initiative for the Minority Franchise Association, helped build a water well in Kenya, and created an Economic Empowerment Initiative in Ghana.

Restaurants from participating states were selected to contend for the national Restaurant Neighbor Award in four categories - small business, mid-size business, large business and Cornerstone Humanitarian. American Express is the founding sponsor of the awards program.

"American Express is proud to be partnering with the National Restaurant Association to honor restaurants across the country for the invaluable contributions they have made in their communities," said Curtis L. Wilson, Vice President and General Manager, Restaurant Industries Group, American Express Company. "The impact restaurateurs have in their communities through charitable activities and relief projects is immeasurable. We are honored to work side by side with them and hope their commitment to community involvement inspires others to do the same."

The National Restaurant Association developed the Restaurant Neighbor Award to recognize outstanding community programs across the country and to inspire other restaurant operators and owners to get involved.

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