

# Micro business shines at Sterling Awards

By Ian Brat  
SCOTTSDALE VIEWS

## AWARD WINNERS

### ■ Micro Business:

Exhibit Experts  
**Other finalists:**  
Advanced Strategy  
Center at Pinnacle  
Peak; Celebration of  
Fine Art

### ■ Small Business:

Newport Furnishings  
**Other finalists:**  
Allegra Print &  
Imaging; Applied  
Creative Inc.

### ■ Big Business:

Cox  
Communications Inc.  
**Other finalists:** First  
National Bank of  
Arizona; Wireless  
Retail Inc.

### ■ Nonprofit:

Scottsdale  
Leadership Inc.  
**Other finalists:**  
Camelot Therapeutic  
Horsemanship;  
McDowell Sonoran  
Land Trust

Susan Ratliff joyfully squeaked when she won first place in the new Micro Business Category of the Scottsdale Area Chamber of Commerce's 18th annual Sterling Awards ceremony.

The founder and president of Exhibit Experts waded through nearly 500 community leaders, a record attendance for the suit-and-tie luncheon, Nov. 21 at the Hilton Scottsdale Resort and Villas.

Finally reaching the podium, smiling widely, she was handed the ribbon-closed envelope with her name and business printed on it.

"Oh my gosh, I'm truly one of the luckiest people I know," said Ratliff, whose Exhibit Experts handles trade show exhibits nationwide. "I'm happy and healthy, my stocks are going up and now I have a Sterling Award!"

Exhibit Experts classifies as a micro business because it employs six or fewer people.

Virginia L. Korte, chamber president and CEO, attributed the new award to the chamber's acknowledgment of Scottsdale's dynamic business environment.

She said small businesses and micro businesses have different concerns and challenges. Micro businesses, she said, have difficulty getting competitive insurance rates, and often face cash, technology and human resources problems.



TORU KAWANA/SCOTTSDALE VIEWS

Susan Ratliff, left, president of Exhibit Express, is congratulated by Cindy Anderson, 2003 Sterling Awards Committee chairwoman, during the 18th annual Sterling Awards Luncheon on Nov. 21 at Scottsdale Hilton Resort and Villas. Ratliff received the Micro Business Award, which is new this year.

Vice Mayor Wayne Ecton said the new award recognizes residents who have boosted the economy.

"Sometimes we look for things to honor, but I don't think that's bad because it drives the community," he said.

The Sterling Awards began as the Small Business Awards in 1985.

Cox Communications Inc., Newport Furnishings and Scottsdale Leadership Inc., were honored in the big business, small business and nonprofit categories, respectively.

Harold Stewart, the city's business service manager in economic vitality, said Scottsdale primarily is a small-business community and micro businesses operate mostly downtown.