

Nine companies named in 35th Annual Wisconsin Manufacturer of the Year Awards

Three northcentral Wisconsin companies recognized, including Merrill's own Weinbrenner Shoe Company

BY TINA L. SCOTT
EDITOR

The Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC) held their 35th Annual Wisconsin Manufacturer of the Year (MOTY) Awards last Thursday, Feb. 22, at a black-tie banquet that honored all 36 finalists from around the state and recognized manufacturers for outstanding achievements.

Locally, Weinbrenner Shoe Company, which was in the running and a named finalist in the Large Manufacturer category (based on company size, 250-499 employees), didn't take the Grand Award as Wisconsin Large Manufacturer of the Year, given for "impeccable performance," according to a press release from the WMC. However, another northcentral Wisconsin finalist, VOLM Companies Inc. from Antigo took the honors this year as Wisconsin Large Manufacturer of the Year.

However, Weinbrenner was one of five recipients for Special Awards given out at the ceremony, "given to companies who demonstrated a unique

quality the judges thought to be notable," two of which went to northcentral Wisconsin businesses. Weinbrenner Shoe Company of Merrill was recognized with a Special Award for Time Tested American Craftsmanship, and Lemke Industrial Machine LLC of Marathon was recognized with a Special Award for Going the Extra Mile.

The MOTY Awards program seeks to recognize Wisconsin companies that are dedicated to quality careers, good business practices, financial growth, innovative processes, and reinvestment into local communities, a press release from the WMC said, citing all they do to grow the state's economy. "Companies were evaluated on many key benchmarks, including financial growth, technological advances, product development, environmental solutions and sustainability, operational excellence and continuous improvement, commitment to employees, and effective research and development. Award winners were selected by

an independent panel of judges," the release said.

Manufacturing is the state's top industry, employing nearly half a million Wisconsin residents and producing more than \$70 billion in economic output each year.

The annual MOTY awards program is sponsored by Baker Tilly, Michael Best & Friedrich LLP, and Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce - the combined state chamber of commerce and manufacturer's association.

Quotes from representatives of these organizations in the release:

"Wisconsin's best superpower is our manufacturing industry," said WMC President and CEO Kurt R. Bauer. "We appreciate the opportunity both to highlight manufacturing as a whole and to showcase the best of our state's workforce. We're incredibly proud of Wisconsin's manufacturing heritage and the notoriety this industry has brought to our state, and are confident that it is companies like

these that will continue to drive Wisconsin forward."

"Over the last 35 years of MOTY we've seen the tremendous growth of Wisconsin's manufacturing industry. It's an honor to celebrate manufacturers with this award program," said Greg Sofra, Baker Tilly's Wisconsin Manufacturing Leader. "On behalf of Baker Tilly, congratulations to this year's winners. We look forward to seeing your continued success and how you will drive innovation in the industry over the next 35 years."

"The Manufacturer of the Year Awards program shows the ingenuity, resilience, and unwavering commitment to excellence that define our state's manufacturing sector," said Michael Best Firm Managing Partner David Krutz. "Michael Best is proud to support this program that celebrates the achievements of outstanding manufacturers and serves as a catalyst for innovation and growth for Wisconsin's economy, communities, and our future."

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