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Section: Local Business

Torch Awards recognize ethical business practices
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Companies all point to their employees as deserving honor

The Better Business Bureau of North Alabama Thursday honored area businesses and nonprofits for ethical behavior, and the winners all credited their employees for maintaining the highest standards.

The ninth annual Torch Awards for Marketplace Ethics were given during a luncheon at the von Braun Center Thursday.

AEgis Technologies, a Huntsville-based modeling and simulation software maker, won the award in the large-size business category. AEgis was founded in 1989 and has about 165 employees.

The company's CEO, Steven Hill, said ethics are at the core of everything the company does. "This is about our employees who come to work and do the right thing every day," he said.

The award ceremony honors good behavior, but it is also a chance for the Better Business Bureau to remind the community that most businesses are trying to do the right thing, said Michelle McDaniel, president of the North Alabama Better Business Bureau.

WILL Technology Inc. received the award for mid-sized businesses - companies that have between 26 and 99 employees. The company specializes in government services work. CEO Crystal Shell said the company's standards reflect the way she was raised.

"We are blessed to have employees who understand their word is exactly that," Shell said.

The small business award winner was Answertel Athens Inc.. In the Athens company's nominating application, it cited Proverbs 22:1 in the Old Testament, which reads "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold."

General Manager Marie McGuire said the credit goes to the company's employees, who "really earned the award."

The nonprofit Torch winner was Junior Achievement of North Alabama Inc., which is focused on educating young people about free enterprise, economics and the right practices of business.

Cindy Morgan, the local organization's general manager, said there were 350 Junior Achievement volunteers in schools in North Alabama last year and the number will be larger this year.

"We really work hard to bring ethics into the schools," Morgan said.

As part of the awards program, five students each received \$1,000 Torch scholarships. Among the winners were four Muscle Shoals area students, and Kathryn Jordan Smith, a student at Huntsville High School.

Finalists for awards in the large business category were **Buffalo Rock** - Huntsville division, Colonial Bank, Colsa Corp. and Advanced Federal Services Corp.

Mid-size business finalists were First American Bank, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Alabama and Premier Bank of the South.

Small business finalists included Cyn Shea's Complete Catering Inc., Fees and Burgess P.C., and Chapman Sisson Architects Inc.

Nonprofit finalists included Heart of the Valley YMCA, the Huntsville Rehabilitation Foundation and United Way of Madison County.