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Diane Portnoy

Founder and CEO

2018 Immigrant Entrepreneur Award Winners Announced

Immigrants honored for their economic, social and scientific contributions in Massachusetts

MALDEN, Mass, May 7, 2018 /On Thursday, May 3, 2018, 230 business and community leaders came together at the Royal Sonesta Boston to honor Massachusetts immigrant entrepreneurs at The 2018 Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards Dinner hosted by The Immigrant Learning Center (ILC). The Master of Ceremonies was WBUR Reporter Shannon Dooling, and Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Jay Ash brought greetings from the commonwealth. Forty nominees from 24 countries with businesses in 19 Massachusetts communities spanning from Williamstown to Hyannis were honored in four business categories: Neighborhood, Growth, Life Science and High-Tech.

The ILC Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards are the only such awards program in New England, and they are a powerful reminder of the contributions immigrants make to American society. The ILC Founder and CEO Diane Portnoy reinforced this by saying, “We are here to share your stories and prove through research that immigrants economically and socially benefit America. It is immigrants and American-born working together that makes this country so special.” Denzil Mohammed, director of The ILC Public Education Institute stated, “The very reason we host this event is to show who immigrants truly are and to prove that they have the qualities that America cherishes most, the qualities that make America great.”

Immigrant Entrepreneur of the Year, Neighborhood Business: Umesh Bhujju, co-founder of Zumi’s Espresso in Ipswich. Country of origin: Nepal

Umesh Bhujju was a climbing instructor and certified mountain guide in Nepal’s Himalayas. He came to the United States at age 19 on an exchange program to teach rock climbing. He stayed to pursue education and now holds a BS from Boston University and an MBA from Johnson & Wales University.

In 2003, Bhujju opened Zumi’s Espresso hoping to prove that business can be profitable while promoting positive social and environmental change. His shop is the social center of downtown Ipswich with art shows, music, lectures and fair-trade, organic coffee.

Bhujju is committed to serving the community and the environment. From greeting each of his 200 daily regulars by name to frequent fundraisers for the local school, he’s made Zumi’s Espresso an integral part of the community. His commitment to the environment is reflected in an extensive recycling program, 100 percent fair trade coffee and straws that are reusable or biodegradable. Used coffee grounds from Zumi’s Espresso are enriching the soil in gardens across Ipswich.

In accepting the award, Bhujju said, “We want to help the community, help underprivileged people around the world and activate people to take better care of our environment. Business can be a force for good, and you can earn profit while working toward the good of the community locally and globally. That view is really informed by our experience with Zumi’s and its social impact.”

Immigrant Entrepreneur of the Year, Business Growth: Fausto Garcia, founder of Five Star Plating in Lawrence. Country of origin: Dominican Republic

With nearly 20 years of experience in the metal anodizing and finishing industry, Fausto Garcia left a good-paying job to open Five Star Plating in 2010. Starting with five employees, the company now employs 42 in Lawrence. Garcia refers to his business as an extension of his family. He offers a level of benefits, training and room for advancement almost unheard of among small manufacturers. His commitment to his employees is reciprocated with a retention rate of nearly 100 percent.

Five Star is also popular with its customers. The company services a wide variety of industries, including construction, IT, aeronautics, electrical components, medical and food. The company's revenue has grown by more than 10 percent every year since inception.

Garcia thanked his family, including his three children in attendance, saying, "Immigrants are not just about creating jobs, [we are] about creating smart kids." He thanked Mayor Daniel Rivera and officials from the City of Lawrence for, "paving the way to my success and welcoming me with open arms. Without them, this would not be possible tonight." Lastly, he thanked the United States for "welcoming me and welcoming all of these immigrants... They have just given us the opportunity to excel."

Immigrant Entrepreneur of the Year, Life Science Business: Michael Koeris, founder of Sample6 in Boston. Country of origin: Germany

As the co-founder and CEO of Sample6, Michael Koeris' mission is to secure the global food supply chain by changing and improving the way food production is tested for bacterial pathogens. The synthetic biology-based technology he and his team developed can detect dangerous pathogens in the food supply chain, which currently cause one in five Americans to get sick or die every year, and catch them before food reaches the market. The diagnostics and software inventions they created have the potential to shift the industry from a reactive safety model to a proactive one through prediction. His innovation already helps customers like Unilever secure their food production, and it can be more broadly applied to reduce hospital acquired infections.

Koeris also co-founded BiotechStart.org, a not-for-profit geared toward helping more biotech startups build their businesses faster. The organization is a fast-growing network of business builders and experts that is helping guide and fuel the next generation of biotech startups.

Koeris credited his success to the local community saying, "The thread that runs through the biotech scene here in Boston and that binds it together tightly is one of community! Immigrants are accepted with open arms into the scientific and biotech entrepreneurial community." He also acknowledged rancor and negativity toward immigrants at a national level, but said, "This negativity is counterbalanced by the positivity of shows of support, generosity, openness, support and altruism I observe in daily interactions between entrepreneurs, between immigrants and former immigrants."

Immigrant Entrepreneur of the Year, High-Tech Business: Bettina Hein, founder of Pixability in Boston. Country of origin: Germany

Bettina Hein is the founder of two successful technology companies: SVOX, which was acquired by Nuance Communications for \$125M in 2011, and Pixability, which she founded in 2008. Pixability simplifies digital

video for marketers with patented technology that allows them to isolate and reach the right consumers across platforms.

As a successful female entrepreneur, Hein is dedicated to the success of other women. She created a Boston-based network of female founders and CEOs that meets monthly called SheEOs, and she co-founded START Global, the leading initiative for Europe's young entrepreneurs. She also holds weekly entrepreneurial office hours open to the community to offer business advice and support. She frequently speaks at universities and organizations around the world on female entrepreneurship and leadership.

Throughout her career, Hein has been recognized for her entrepreneurial accomplishments. In 2014, she was named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum. In 2012, she received the L'Oréal NEXT Generation Award honoring the top five women leading groundbreaking digital companies and Boston Business Journal's "40 Under 40 Award."

Hein pointed out that the Awards Dinner was the first time she had been publicly thanked for, "doing what I do, which is create jobs." She referred to the United States as "the land of entrepreneurship" and described her entrepreneurial journey, "I've never had a real job. I started my first company out of graduate school." Her advice to her peers concluded with, "Most of all, don't give up.... I'm counting on you. Everybody here that supports entrepreneurs is counting on you. Secretary Ash is counting on you to keep the job-creating engines that you are going. The U.S. needs you so much. Go do it."

Information about all the nominees for The ILC Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards can be found on The ILC's website at www.ilctr.org.



PHOTO CAPTION From left: Mass. Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Jay Ash; Zumi's Espresso Founder Umesh Bhuj; Five Star Plating Founder Fausto Garcia; The Immigrant Learning Center

Founder and CEO Diane Portnoy; Pixability Founder Bettina Hein; Sample6 Founder Michael Koeris; WBUR Reporter Shannon Dooling; and The Immigrant Learning Center Public Education Institute Director Denzil Mohammed

About The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc.

The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. (ILC) of Malden, MA, is a not-for-profit organization that gives immigrants a voice in three ways. The English Language Program provides free, year-round English classes to immigrant and refugee adults in Greater Boston to help them become successful workers, parents and community members. The Public Education Institute informs Americans about the economic and social contributions of immigrants in our society, and the Institute for Immigration Research, a joint venture with George Mason University, conducts research on the economic contributions of immigrants.

For more information, visit the website <http://www.ilctr.org>. The ILC can also be found on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr.

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