

NEWS RELEASE



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FAMILY-RUN INSURANCE FIRM TOPS 2006 CITIPOWER PORT PHILLIP BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Whitbread Insurance Brokers, a family-run business on St Kilda Road, won the overall 2006 CitiPower Port Phillip Business Excellence Award last night (October 19), as well as taking out the National Australia Bank (Small to Medium Business) Award.

John Whitbread established Whitbread Insurance in 1978. The firm now has 44 employees, including Mr Whitbread's two daughters, son, sister-in-law, nephew and the eldest daughter's best friend! Mr Whitbread told the capacity crowd of 440 at the Carousel on Albert Park Lake, "We're a family business which works for other family businesses. This approach suits because we understand what families are about," he said.

"I must pay tribute to my daughter Angela who had the foresight to enter our company in the awards. We're only successful thanks to the dedication of our staff to the cause."

Whitbread offers general insurance to other small and medium enterprises with specialist schemes for body corporate managers, doctors, bed and breakfasts, boutique hotels, landlords, free wheeler vehicles (specialist vehicles for the disabled) and franchises such as Red Rooster, House and Body Map.

The company insures over 6500 bodies corporate and has an annual turnover of \$50 million. Last year it launched four new insurance products. Its client retention rate in 2005 was 97 per cent. To cut down on paper, the firm this year gave each client the option of corresponding by email. Most have embraced the offer.

Port Phillip mayor, Janet Bolitho, spoke at the awards and said that she was particularly impressed by Whitbread's family friendly policies. "Its staff is encouraged to work only during set office hours, Of the 44 employees, 14 work part-time. Five are mums, four are semi-retired men, and the finance manager is a prominent artist who works two days a week and paints for three. Whitbread's also gives a lot to the community."

This year, 300 local businesses were nominated for the awards, 70 submitted full entries and 28 finalists attended in the flesh. **Cameron Daddo** compered the event which also featured performances by **Emma Gilmartin Trio** and **Swing Patrol**.

The Jewish Museum, the only professional museum in the City of Port Phillip, took out the inaugural VECCI Tourism Award.

Cr Bolitho said that one of the council's major initiatives this year had been to establish a new economic development and tourism department. "One of our missions is to encourage tourism in ways that doesn't create grief for local residents. We want to be welcoming and hospitable but at the same ensure that the rights of local residents aren't encroached," she said.

"A new tourism award category was introduced this year to acknowledge just how important visitors are to this community and this economy."

"This award could not have gone to a more worthy institution. The Jewish Museum houses a collection of over 15,000 items relating to Australian Jewish history. It has five permanent exhibitions and three or four temporary exhibitions a year. The subjects are always fascinating, whether it's an examination of the *schmatte* business (clothing trade), the Dreyfus affair, the photography of Diane Arbus or the current interactive exhibition for kids based on Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*.

"The Jewish Museum is always reaching out to new audiences and it's not shy of courting controversy. It recently held highly successful a multi-faith exhibition featuring the work of three women artists – a Christian, a Jew and a Muslim. "

The museum annually invites residents in Alma Road in for a free special opening. It also obtains funding to enable disadvantaged schools and others to visit at no cost.

For the second year in a row, **Entertainment House**, a South Melbourne firm, won the Deloitte Export Award. In 2002 life-partners Jan-Marie Henry and Philip Leahy started marketing DVDs on eBay after KISS-FM, which Mr Leahy was involved in, failed to get a radio licence. The firm exports 60 per cent of its product to 65 different countries. It is now the biggest seller of DVDS on eBay in Australia and in the top 5 in the UK because it processes and delivers orders at the fastest possible rate – with each order being accompanied by a personally signed letter and tasty gift and marketing pamphlet.

Earlier this year, Entertainment House took out an international award in the United States for its "outstanding commitment to the community of Marketworks' sellers" and its volunteer work for the non-profit Professional eBay Sellers Alliance. The award was one of five awards presented at eBay's annual conference in Las Vegas that attracted 15,000 people.

Another repeat winner was East St Kilda catering firm, **Red Scooter**, which again took out the Beachcomber Café Hospitality Award. Last year it also snapped up the EPA Victoria Sustainable Business Award. In the last decade or so, the function centre, which can host up to 300 for cocktails and 250 for a sit-down dinner, has built a very solid reputation as a funky venue with first-class food and service. Its corporate clients include Mazda Australia, Qantas, Ego Pharmaceuticals, Channel 7, Channel 10, Toyota, World Vision, and BHP Biliton, to name but a few ...

A new entrant into the awards was **Kegs on Legs**, founded two years ago in Port Melbourne by RMIT students, Campbell King and Valjean Boynton. They won the Port Phillip Business Association Young Entrepreneur Award for their company which begun to deliver kegs of draught beer to parties two years ago. In 2004-2005, Kegs on Legs notched up just \$9000 in sales but this financial year the forecast is \$150,000. Its market is largely the 18-30 demographic.

Immediacy, a South Melbourne media and communications firm, won the Australian Institute of Management Micro-Business Award for companies of five or less staff. Set up by Tara Byrne and Linda Marshall five years ago to fill a perceived need in media production for the corporate and government sectors, Immediacy has flourished. It produces live events such as *The Age Good Food Guide* launch and Work Safe Week, documentaries such as one about the future vision for the Melbourne, Healesville and Werribee zoos and a travel program sponsored by Tourism Victoria for Skybus TV.

The Aptify Innovation Award went to the **Coaching Institute** in Albert Park. The Coaching Institute is the only organisation in Australia to offer a diploma in life coaching. Set up two years ago by Sharon Pearson, its business is booming. Over the past financial year, its profits have gone from \$40,000 per 90 days to \$320,000 per 90 days. It offers pro bono coaching to the Sacred Heart Mission.

Alafia Gallery in Elwood won the Telstra Shop (Port Melbourne) Retail Award. A leading specialist in African and tribal artworks, furniture, jewellery and giftware, Alafia also showcases the works of local artisans. It offers local artists the upstairs space for individual exhibitions for free, taking only a small commission on sales. The gallery choreographed a 2003 lantern festival involving 400 local school children and 1200 lanterns.

“Winners received trophies, training packages, certificates, media coverage, an original artwork by local artist Sarah Edwards and – and, of course, a great marketing advantage. What really impressed me is how much they all give back to the local community,” said Cr Bolitho.

During the award ceremony, restaurateur **Gail Donovan** and South Melbourne realtor **John Pratt** were inducted into the Port Phillip Business Hall of Fame. Former inductees include Michael Gudinski (The Mushroom Group), Tolis Marangoudis (The Hair Room), Alastair Chisholm (Chisholm & Gamon Property) and Tony Hill (McCluskys Lawyers).

Cr Bolitho said that there were 8,500 reasons for holding these awards. “When it comes to hard work, determination, long hours and persistence, the 8,500 businesses within Port Phillip stand tall, though many are actually quite small,” she said.

“This municipality is home to some of Australia’s most interesting, creative and cutting-edge businesses. Looking through the entries, you can’t help but be bowled over by some of the smart ideas and practices.”

The awards are now in their 4th year and according to Cr Bolitho, the judging panel was mightily impressed by the overall quality of businesses nominated for the awards. The judges were Jessie McAuliffe (Rotarian and Cavill Mayor), Stewart Clark, Rita Zumbo and John Meney (National Australia Bank, St Kilda Road Business Centre), and Mike McIntosh, the council's manager of economic development and tourism.

The awards' major sponsor is **Citipower**. Other sponsors include *Emerald Hill Weekly*, Palace Cinemas, Australian Institute of Management, nab, Beachcomber, Telstra Shop (Port Melbourne), BDO Chartered Accountants & Advisers, VECCI, Aptify(TM), Port Phillip Business Association, Mylund Group, Carousel, Anne Middleton Gallery, and Printbound.

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