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Directions

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Journeys of Curiosity

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...Journeys of Curiosity

Meet the Entrepreneur of the Year Candidates

TwinWest's 2011 Entrepreneur of the Year finalists represent established, successful leaders who have proven themselves. The Chamber will recognize all three of these finalists and select one as the Entrepreneur of the Year at the 2011 "Journeys of Curiosity" Small Business Awards Luncheon. In the next few pages, *Directions* magazine give you a look at each. TwinWest's Entrepreneur of the Year is a member entrepreneur who has established and maintained a successful business of \$100 million or less in annual revenue, and is five or more years old.



George Klauser, CEO
Opportunity Partners, Minnetonka
Hometown: Milwaukee
Favorite business book:
Good to Great



Cindy Leines, co-owner
C.E.L., Plymouth
Hometown: Valley View Farms, ND
Favorite lessons-for-life book:
Gift from the Sea



Jeff Peterson, president
Total Energy Concepts, New Hope
Hometown: New Hope
Favorite business book:
IACOCCA an Autobiography

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...Journeys of Curiosity



George Klauser, Opportunity Partners
Entrepreneur of the Year Finalist

What Klauser enjoys most about being an entrepreneur: It is in my DNA...I really do not know how to think any other way!

Klauser on luck: Luck or “being in the right place at the right time” definitely plays a role in business. Earlier this year, I was at a meeting and Kim Keprios from Arc Greater Twin Cities happened to

be there. I had met Kim before, and as we chatted I shared with her Opportunity Partners’ certified training program with Dunwoody College of Technology. As a result of our conversation Kim had her staff contact us to discuss our training model. Arc Greater Twin Cities determined that working with us on a retail training program would be the perfect way for them to meet their outcomes. Being in the right place at the right time – that’s luck.

Klauser on persistence: When I joined Opportunity Partners as CEO in April 2010, it became clear to me that at a time when many companies and organizations were cutting staff, we needed to invest in our staff. Like other mid-sized companies, we were struggling with the loss of our group health insurance plan and had issues with employee turnover. It became one of my primary goals to get Opportunity Partners back on a group health insurance plan and to commit to a culture of health and wellness for our staff, as well as the people we serve. I’m proud to say we have accomplished this, but it took a lot of persistence and hard work.

Klauser on forethought: As a nonprofit organization, we are about 80% government funded, however we know that pool of money is shrinking. I’ve never believed in spending energy in a “sky is falling” mode, but I do believe that we need to be proactive in order to be ready for the future. In our case, we are off-setting anticipated cuts with alternative revenue sources like our contract packaging and assembly operations, as well as our contracted community work teams. We have branched into the dry food packaging business, packing foods like candy and dried fruit, which required investments in equipment and personnel.



Cindy Leines, C.E.L.
Entrepreneur of the Year Finalist

What Leines enjoys most about being an entrepreneur: Life is never boring! It is truly about meeting new people, helping others find creative solutions and resources, and ultimately helping them succeed that makes being an entrepreneur most rewarding.

Leines on luck: I have no Irish in me, but a bit of the “luck of the Irish” has been helpful in maintaining balance in challenging economic times. Having surrounded our company by a group of smart, practical and experienced advisers, we’ve relied on using their collective insight and expertise to help modify our plans for the future. We have identified internal operational changes and creative solutions that had a very positive effect on our company. Our clients expected the same level of high customer service but they, too, were faced with economic changes... so we repackaged services that could be in line with their modified budgets.

Leines on persistence: I think most business owners who are still in business would say that the past couple years required an extra dose of persistence. It required looking at how we packaged and priced services while staying true to the high level of customer services that our clients deserve. As owners, both Kari Logan and I reviewed every aspect of business from marketing and sales to operations, staffing and expenses. Every member of our team gave extra effort on all fronts.

Leines on forethought: Four years ago we started looking more intensely at the changing world of communications. We sought out various SEO and technology information and experts. It was clear that “real-time PR” (what others call social media) was going to alter the marketing world and like all new tools, social media would need to be implemented in a strategic fashion. More than two years ago we established the Social Media Incubator, a collaboration of seasoned professionals from our company (C.E.L.) and SEO experts Small Business Mavericks. Our Social Media Incubator has attracted media attention and a bank of new clients.