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On Top of the City

Introducing the winners of the first-ever CityLife Awards



Wilmington is giving the red-carpet treatment to a select group of people who are doing their best to make the city a better place to live, work, and play. Meet the recipients of our inaugural CityLife Awards, and discover what makes their accomplishments special.

Wilmingtonian of the Year: Henry Beckler

Few people have done as much as Henry Beckler has when it comes to bringing business to the city. Or to the entire state, for that matter.

Born in Rochester, N.Y., Beckler graduated from the University of Rochester before serving in the U.S. Army. He moved to New York City to work for Chase Manhattan Bank in the loan-restructuring department. While there, he earned his MBA from NYU. He made Wilmington his new home in 1965.

Beckler's legacy in the city began when he opened the Cannery on Lancaster Pike and set up operations in Ecuador to support it. In 1976, he went to work for Bank of Delaware—now PNC—and was instrumental in establishing a precious-metals industry in the city, even helping to bring Hunt silver to be stored here. Beckler developed the bank's Delaware Investment Holding Companies niche, which became another industry coup for Wilmington and would later set the stage for his **Corporate Holding Services**, of which he is president and chairman today.

While at Bank of Delaware, Beckler persuaded Chase Manhattan Bank to establish operations in Delaware that would manage overseas investments. Shortly thereafter, he convinced Chase to set up the first credit card operation in the state. This was followed by the creation of the Financial Center Development Act, which brought with it more than 30,000 jobs for Delawareans.

Beckler stayed with Bank of Delaware until 1989, when it was sold to PNC. He then founded Star Financial LP to help companies unable to get conventional financing and was one of the first in the country to join the Small Business Administration in an effort to make loans and financial counseling more available to minorities and women. In 1997, Beckler bought and revitalized the inactive **World Trade Center Institute** Delaware, a nonprofit organization that promotes Wilmington and the state of Delaware in the global marketplace. He continues to serve as

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president.

A member, past and present, of countless committees and interest groups, Beckler, along with his wife, Barbara, also give generously to the arts, including the Delaware Theatre Company, the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts (which Henry co-founded), and the Delaware Symphony.

What the voters said: "Henry just turned 77, and he has filled the past 42 years since his arrival in Wilmington with an incredible amount of activity, economic development, ingenuity, entrepreneurship, cultural involvement, and a selfless concern for bettering the environment around him. To this day, he can be seen wandering the not-so-nice neighborhoods of Wilmington and talking to people about their impressions of the city and what they would like to see improved."

Entrepreneur of the Year: Tom Hudson

For two decades as a CPA, Tom Hudson was in the business of helping other people realize their entrepreneurial dreams. For many of those years, a framed painting of a restaurant hung over the doorway of his office, indicating a dream of his own. In the painting was a sign that read "Hudson's."

"I would look at it and say, 'One day...'" Hudson told CityLife in a profile that ran last year.

After undergoing major neck surgery, Hudson decided the time had come to follow that dream. Hudson opened **Domaine Hudson Wine Bar & Eatery** in the fall of 2005 with the goal of creating a place where people could enjoy fine food and wine at a good value—without having to leave Wilmington.

Domaine Hudson strikes a balance where wine-tasting is both cultural and approachable. "Wine is the ultimate compliment to quality food," Hudson was quoted as saying in the article. At the same time, "How simple is wine and cheese? No one does it anymore."

Hudson chose downtown, he says, because he wanted to be near other solid, top-quality businesses. Each year, Hudson participates with his restaurateur colleagues in Wilmington's annual City Restaurant Week. He hopes it will raise the profile of Wilmington and draw more people to the city he loves. (Domaine Hudson is also trying to raise its own profile; starting in January, the restaurant will offer lunch hours.)

Hudson has also done his share to beautify his surroundings. Along with his wife, Meg—who helps manage the restaurant—Tom has participated in the Wilmington City Gardens Contest for the past two years by entering the small garden that sits in front of Domaine Hudson. It took third place both years in the community organization category. Don't be surprised to see "gardener" added to the list of Tom Hudson's passions one day.

What the voters said: "[Tom] is dedicated to raising the level of expectations for downtown Wilmington, especially among people who believe that they can only get a similar experience in Philadelphia or other major cities. He has shown, with numerous accolades and consistently good reviews, that it's possible for a business in Wilmington to aim high and succeed."

Neighbor of the Year: Christiana Care, Wilmington Campus

Nearly three-quarters of the employees who work at Christiana Care's Wilmington campus hospital also live in the city. Who better to serve Wilmington's neighbors than some of its own?

Founded in 1890, Wilmington Hospital—which became incorporated with Christiana Care in 1985—serves about 50,000 patients a year in its emergency facilities alone. Another 62,000 are cared for at the hospital's Health Center, a unit that specializes in urban family practice. Many of the Health Center patients are without health insurance, the hospital says, but no one is ever turned away. (A team of dentists also volunteers to meet with patients.)

The hospital also runs the First State School, a school for children whose illnesses prevent them from attending their regular schools.

Add to these figures the 1,500 knee and hip replacements that are handled annually, as well as more than 20,000 cancer, cardiac, and chronic-disease screenings and educational sessions the hospital performs, and you'll have a good idea just how embedded in the community Christiana Care is.

Supporting these Herculean efforts are the hospital's 1,600 doctors,

nurses, staff, and teachers. People who, it's safe to say, are just as proud to call themselves employees as they are to call themselves neighbors.

What the voters said: "Every day for more than 100 years, the people—nurses, doctors, food-preparers, aides, and staff—at the intersection of 14th and Washington streets have shared their lives, offered their compassion and served their neighbors; they have created a thriving neighborhood of their own that grew with Wilmington."

Partnership of the Year: Delaware Art Museum, Christina Cultural Arts Center

During the 2006-2007 school year, the Christina Cultural Arts Center and Kuumba Academy collaborated with the Delaware Art Museum to create an exciting new arts-education program. Entitled Project ART SCOPE (Students Creating, Observing, Participating and Engaging), the creative partnership offers students a stimulating arts experience designed to integrate with their core academic content, according to spokespeople from the organizations involved.

The program allows students to visit the museum and embark on one-hour guided tours through the permanent collections and special exhibitions. Following the tour, the students go to the museum's Bank of America Education Wing to meet with an instructor, who urges the children to create art that relates to the works they've just seen. Back at school, post-visit lessons are implemented by Kuumba faculty. At the end of the program, the museum hosts Art Smart, an exhibition for Kuumba staff, students, and their families that features student artwork.

The trips to the museum resonated with many of the students, who learned about abstract art, self-portraits, and the works of Howard Pyle. In the words of third-grader Tatiana Collins: "It felt like I was in art heaven."

What the voters said: "A common theme of this partnership is recognizing students' active role in learning. Throughout this program, students utilize the arts to engage in visual learning, oral and written language, and the creation of their own works of art. They will use art to develop analytical skills, form unique opinions, and strengthen their ability to learn through multiple formats."

Rising Star of the Year: Costa Dimas

When you see Constantine Dimas unassumingly walking around the city, you might never know what a dedicated, hard-working entrepreneur he is. When you speak to him, however, you get it. Dimas injects passion into everything he does. From opening **Costa's** on West Street in 2005—based on a comprehensive business plan that was 15 pages long in its abbreviated form—to taking a second chance with **The Exchange** on Market Street earlier this year, Dimas has found the only way to succeed in a city on the rise is to be on the rise yourself.

Backed with the mantra "Eat Downtown"—add .net and you'll get the web address for his restaurants—Costa recently opened his third eatery, **ThoroBreads**, in Tower One of Christina Landing. He's also been a busy family man: He and wife Ana welcomed their first child, baby boy Simos, late last year.

All this, and still Dimas finds time to sit on the board of Downtown Visions and the Main Street Wilmington promotions committee.

Then again, Dimas' life—at least since entering the working world more than a decade ago—has been marked by busy schedules. Born in Manhattan and schooled at Bronx Science and Columbia University, Dimas worked at the White House Office of Public Liaison, facilitating official state visits. He then linked with U.S. Sen. Charles E. Schumer as Schumer's deputy chief of staff.

Such experience proved helpful for Dimas' future position: bussing tables at Robert De Niro's Tribeca Grill. Dimas eventually became manager. Well-known for attracting celebrity clientele, the restaurant also made sure "every penny, fork and butter knife was accounted for," Dimas told CityLife in 2005.

Now settled in a new city, Dimas has transitioned just fine. Or as his business partner James Mallios puts it: "Wilmington could ask for no finer ambassador, champion or adopted son."

What the voters said: "Costa is a member of a slowly emerging class of people, individuals who have chosen to leave larger cities and make Wilmington—the city, not the surrounding suburbs—their home and place of business...I honestly can't keep track of all the boards he sits on and

volunteers his time to."

The Categories

Wilmingtonian of the Year

Should exhibit an outward passion for the city. This person's actions should directly contribute to the revitalization and continuing growth of Wilmington, whether it is through his or her career or community activism.

Entrepreneur of the Year

Is a person whose vision coincides with the continuing growth of the city. The winner will have chosen to be a part of the city's renaissance by beginning his or her business here.

Neighbor or Neighborhood of the Year

Embodies the spirit of community in the city. The winner will have worked together to solidify a sense of community and togetherness as well as adding to the beauty of Wilmington.

Partnership of the Year

Will be presented to companies, businesses, or organizations working together or with other partners, or multiple organizations that have collaborated on projects or programs that have directly enhanced the city.

Rising Star of the Year

Will be presented to the individual or business/organization that displays promise for the future. The winner will exhibit a passion for the city and has leadership potential that ensures he or she will be a champion of Wilmington for years to come.

Winners were determined by a panel that included city employees, representatives from the mayor's office, local business owners, the staff of the Wilmington Renaissance Corp., and the editors of CityLife magazine.

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