


HONOR ROLL
Winners saluted with local tourism agency's highest honor

James E. Winner Jr. and Donna Winner, owners of several Mercer County destinations including Tara – A Country Inn, The Winner, Buhl Mansion Guesthouse and Spa and the Radisson Hotel Sharon, were honored with the 2010 Bill Knecht Tourism Award at the VisitMercerCountyPA's annual dinner meeting.

The award is the agency's highest honor, recognizing individuals who have made outstanding contributions to tourism in Mercer County.

The award is named after the late Bill Knecht, former CEO of Wendell August Forge and a board member of VisitMercerCountyPA (formerly known as Mercer County Convention and Visitors Bureau).

The Winners were close personal friends of Knecht, who died in 2004. He and Jim Winner traveled extensively together and the two held annual Fourth of July parties and fireworks at Tara for family, friends and the staffs of all the Winner companies and Wendell August Forge employees.

The guest speaker at the dinner was Will Knecht, son of the late Bill Knecht and present owner and CEO of Wendell August Forge.



Gene Paulson/Business Chronicle

Jim and Donna Winner accept the 2010 Bill Knecht Tourism Award from Laura Ackley, second from right, president of VisitMercerCountyPA, and Peggy Mazyck, right, executive director.

The Winners began their work in the tourism industry when they opened a small retail store in Transfer and bought the Shenango Inn in the

late 1970s. From there they went on to renovate the empty 1854 Koonce mansion on the Shenango River Lake, creating Tara – A Country Inn.

The inn opened in 1986 and after new renovations now features 27 rooms, several restaurants, indoor and outdoor pools, public tours and elegant gardens with stunning settings for outdoor gazebo weddings and a virtual museum of Civil War artifacts and Gone With The Wind memorabilia.

Other projects instrumental in adding to Mercer County's tourism industry include The Winner off-price department store, the Radisson Hotel Sharon, and their saving and restoration of the Buhl Mansion Guesthouse and Spa.

"We are proud to honor Jim and Donna Winner with the 2010 Bill Knecht Tourism Award," said Peggy Mazyck, executive director of VisitMercerCountyPA. "Their work over the last several decades has helped transform Mercer County into a great tourist destination and they have helped position the county for further growth."

The couple also received the Pennsylvania Tourism and Lodging Association's Spirit of Hospitality Innkeeper of the Year Award in 2007 and in 2008

they were inducted into the inaugural class of the Keystone Society for Tourism, handpicked by Gov. Ed Rendell. The society honors Pennsylvania visionaries in destination leadership and community development.