

Former Fresno Bee publisher Ray Steele Jr. honored by Fresno Chamber

By Robert
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Ray Steele Jr. speaks after accepting the Leon S. Peters Award, which is based on outstanding leadership.
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- Fresno Chamber of Commerce honors Ray Steele Jr. with the 2015 Leon S. Peters award during the annual Valley Business Awards Luncheon on Wednesday.
- Steele said he was honored to receive the award and urged others to live by Peters' example of honesty, integrity and philanthropy.
- The chamber also awarded honors to four companies for their entrepreneurial success: Poppy's Jam, Broadway Motion Design, Deli Delicious and Patrick James.

Ray Steele Jr., former publisher of The Fresno Bee, was honored Wednesday as the 2015 winner of the Leon S. Peters Award.

The Fresno Chamber of Commerce presented the award during the annual Valley Business Awards luncheon held at the New Exhibit Hall. The Peters award recognizes a local businessperson for success in business, leadership and community service. Several previous winners were seated on the stage with Steele as he was presented with the

honor.

“I feel very special to be sitting with these previous award winners,” Steele said. “They have helped to make a substantial difference in this community.”

Peters, born to immigrant parents and raised on a small farm in the Fowler area, grew up to become one of the San Joaquin Valley’s top business leaders.

Steele also grew up in Fowler and was familiar with the Peters family. He and his father used to deliver grape stakes to the family’s ranches.

He said growing up in a rural community taught him some important values, including hard work, loyalty, honesty and integrity — all traits that Peters exemplified.

“You learned to care for others and share with those who are less fortunate because there is always someone who has a greater need than we do,” Steele said. “You also learned to take pride in your community and to make it a better place.”

Steele rose from young reporter to president and publisher of The Fresno Bee. He joined The Bee in 1967 as a reporter. He became metro editor, overseeing local news coverage, before leaving Fresno in 1982 to be administrative director of The Sacramento Bee, a sister McClatchy Co. paper. He returned to Fresno in 1986 as The Bee’s general manager, then went back to Sacramento as a McClatchy corporate executive in 1993. He finished his McClatchy career as The Fresno Bee publisher from July 2001 to October 2008.

Steele is also a 1968 Fresno State graduate and the 2005 recipient of the Fresno State Alumni Association’s Outstanding Alumnus Award, presented on behalf of the College of Arts and Humanities at the Top Dog Alumni Awards Gala.

As part of Wednesday’s luncheon, the chamber also recognized the winners of entrepreneur awards. Awards were given in four categories, including high school, college, rising star and entrepreneur of the year. Patrick James received the Zinkin Entrepreneur of the Year Award; Deli Delicious, the Rising Star Entrepreneur of the Year Award; Broadway Motion Design, the College Entrepreneur of the Year Award; and Poppy’s Jam, the High School Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

Patrick Mon Pere Sr. said he always wanted to open a private label clothing store and is amazed at what Patrick James has become. The men’s clothing store opened its first shop in Fresno 53 years ago and now has 13 stores in California, Oregon and Arizona.

“I am very overwhelmed to be selected for this honor,” Mon Pere Sr. said. “I am in my later years in life and that makes it especially meaningful.”

The owners of Deli Delicious have also experienced tremendous growth. The Fresno-based sandwich chain began franchising in 2009 and has quadrupled the number of its stores. Nathan Gilbert, Deli Delicious’s franchise development director, said the company has opened 27 restaurants and 23 more are in the works.

Gilbert credits the company’s founders, the Hobab family, for having the vision, work ethic and perseverance to make the company a success.

College entrepreneur winner Quentin Sanford is grateful his wife, Laura, encouraged him to start his own business. Sanford launched Broadway Motion Design in 2013 to provide affordable and professional scenic projections for theaters worldwide. The young company has completed over 25 shows in more than 500 venues.

Sanford considers himself fortunate to do what he loves. “I learned very early on to be devoted to something you are passionate about,” Sanford said. “I am never tired or depleted and I feel privileged to be an entrepreneur.”

Kelsey Hershey is still in high school, but has been bitten by the entrepreneurial bug. She is founder of Poppy's Jam, an organic jam made with strawberries, apples, honey and lemon juice. She credits her family and teacher Linda Jean Voth for their support and guidance. The jam is named after her grandfather, Ernest Rose, who she referred to as Poppy.

"I am just so excited and humbled to win," Hershey said. "It is an amazing feeling."

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