

November 1, 2009

Sink: Time to celebrate, before slogging on

The Top 100 luncheon is my favorite business event of the year because it's a pure celebration of hard work and results.

Again this year, the Riverside Convention Center will be packed Thursday with tables full of the people who work at the 100 honorees, and they'll be having a great time. They should. They've earned it.

Employees of companies cracking the Top 100 for the first time especially will whoop it up. Those 16 businesses are listed at right.

Sandy Parker, CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance, told my colleague Matt Daneman that Top 100 organizers had worried the economy might hurt corporate sponsorship of the luncheon this year. Instead, the program wound up with more sponsors but they contributed smaller amounts, Parker said.

If that reflects the belt tightening so prevalent in the business world these days, don't expect things to change overnight just because the economy is finally starting to grow again.

Tim White, managing partner of the Rochester office of KPMG, the accounting firm that's the other main Top 100 sponsor along with the RBA, noted that the 100 companies' combined revenues are down. For many, their financial results included only one period — the fourth quarter of 2008 — that was particularly weak.

Because much of 2009 has been every bit as weak, White foresees that the Top 100 list coming out next year might well show another drop in revenues.

When White and I chatted Thursday, the government had just reported a 3.5 percent annualized increase in gross domestic product, the broadest measure of the U.S. economy. Although the growth was widely expected, it was good news nevertheless because we had just been through four consecutive quarters of shrinking GDP, something that hadn't happened in most of our lifetimes.

"Things have stabilized," White said. "We're seeing a small pickup in trends." But he's skeptical about how much growth is really coming, wondering, for example, how long the Federal Reserve can keep interest rates at record lows before inflation looms.

In other words, the Top 100 companies need to keep pushing because tough times aren't going away. But first they should have a good time basking in the glow of being one of our region's elite performers.

"Rochester has done a good job of working through these difficulties," White said. "We should be proud of these companies."

Additional Facts

First-timers

Of this year's Top 100 companies, 16 are making their first appearance.

No. 1: Auction Direct USA.

No. 8: Rochester Precision Optics.

No. 15: The Omni Group.

No. 18: Mech Tech HVAC.

No. 19: Employee Relations Associates.

No. 20: Eagle Productivity Solutions.

No. 25: Xelic.

No. 27: WebTitle Agency.

No. 51: Classic Automation.

No. 54: Sydor Instruments.

No. 64: Empire Precast.

No. 66: New York Commercial Flooring.

No. 76: Turner Engineering.

No. 86: Emerald Print Management.

No. 97: Jackson Welding Supply.

No. 100: Davidson Fink.