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Wegmans wins U.S. Chamber of Commerce award

*By Tom Tobin
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Wegmans Food Markets Inc. has won a major corporate citizenship award from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The Rochester-based grocer beat out such business heavyweights as ITT, Oracle and Best Buy in being named the 2009 recipient of the Corporate Stewardship Award, which recognizes companies that combine business success with community activism. Accounting firm KPMG was last year's winner.

The 2009 award was presented Tuesday night at an event in Washington hosted by the U.S. Chamber's Business Civic Leadership Center, created to foster community involvement by member corporations.

Wegmans was nominated for the award by the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, which is among the regional food banks supported every year by the company's Check Out Hunger campaign, during which shoppers are given a chance to donate at the grocery checkout.

In accepting the award Tuesday, Wegmans CEO Danny Wegman said: "Leading with your heart can make a successful business. That's how free enterprise works."

"There is no company more deserving of this," Rochester Business Alliance President Sandy Parker said Wednesday. "Look at all Wegmans has done for this community."

"A lot of what they do is in the small things, as in when they lowered prices of staple foods last year during the economic crisis."

Natasha Thompson, president and CEO of the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, which nominated Wegmans, said she was "flabbergasted" when the announcement came at the end of Tuesday's dinner.

"Everyone was hugging and applauding," she said. "It's just a great thing for upstate New York when something like this happens. Wegmans was going up against really big companies. I felt proud to be an upstater."