

Baltimore mayor's business awards still going strong

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More than three years ago, energy and engineering firm Bithgroup Technologies Inc. struggled to find the engineers and scientists it needed to keep pace with its growth.

So Bithgroup turned to high school students, exposing them to the projects churned out of the company's office on West Monument Street in hopes of inspiring future generations of tech-savvy workers.

"We decided to be more proactive and begin to create our own supply, if you will, of engineers, scientists and mathematicians," said Bithgroup CEO Robert L. Wallace.

On Monday, Bithgroup and 11 other city companies and organizations received Mayor's Business Recognition Awards for their community outreach and making Baltimore "a better place to live and work."

They are "businesses who have big and kind hearts for the city and its people," said Mayor Sheila Dixon.

Dixon praised the dozen recipients and room full of business leaders for doing the work that government cannot as the city, state and businesses of all sizes struggle with the slumping economy.

"Through good times and bad times, Baltimore businesses have always given back to the community," Dixon said.

Former Mayor William Donald Schaefer first handed out a recognition award 35 years ago. Monday's event was sponsored by the Greater Baltimore Committee and Baltimore Development Corp.

"These companies and organizations have worked hard to make a real difference in our city," GBC President and CEO Donald C. Fry said. "They've gone that extra mile to give back to their communities, which ultimately makes Baltimore a better place to live and work."

For three years, Bithgroup has offered paid summer internships to high school students from low-income families. They complete research projects related to the work being done by the company's staff.

"We cater to the industries that we're in, energy engineering, biometrics, robotics, that kind of thing, and begin to grow our own," Wallace said. "We pay them to learn."

M&T Bank won for buying 5,000 reusable bags for the St. George's Garden Club to hand out during Earth Week to cut down on the use of plastic shopping bags. The bank also sponsored an essay contest for schoolchildren on the environmental hazards of using plastic bags.

J. Michael Riley, vice president of community involvement, said M&T was "proud to do it."

"There is a very strong conservation aspect of the garden club," he said. "That's what this is all about."

The other recipients, like Bithgroup and M&T, focused heavily on youth outreach and environmental projects.

"It's really in line with our whole effort of a cleaner, greener, healthier and safer city," Dixon said. "It's just a sample of how much businesses are invested in this city and committed to this city."

Other award winners are:

- Banks Contracting Co., which mentored architectural and engineering students from high school through graduate school.
- More than 250 children and volunteers from Constellation Energy Group Inc. prepared meals for the poor and baby kits for new mothers in homeless shelters.
- Coppin State University provided mentors for high school students and hosted competitions in robotics and black history.
- Forest City-New East Baltimore Partnership employees volunteered with Movable Feast, which delivers meals to people living with HIV and AIDS.
- Hyatt Regency Baltimore employees mentored high school students and coached elementary school students.
- The Maryland Port Administration converted more than seven acres of pavement at city schools into green space.
- PNC Financial Services Group focused on children from birth to age 5 with initiatives to help them prepare for kindergarten.
- PricewaterhouseCoopers held a community service day during which the majority of its staff volunteered at 12 local organizations.
- Royal Farms funded a health food station and the Port Discovery Children's Museum.
- W.R. Grace & Co. donated more than \$774,000 in 2009 and its workers volunteered at a host of community service projects.



Mayor Sheila Dixon (left) and BDC Chairman Arnold Williams (center) present an award to M&T Bank's Atwood "Woody"

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