



## Queens businesses win awards

BY HEIN AUNG

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Two Queens Businesses have won this year's Neighborhood Achievement Awards, which were chosen from the city's 300 unique neighborhoods.

The 14 awards were presented to honor those businesses and organizations which showed outstanding commitment in serving the community and the growth of New York's economy. Great Bear Auto Repair and Auto Body Shop from Flushing and The Entrepreneur's Space-An Incubator for Food & Business from Long Island City have won the Small Business of the Year Award and the Workforce Innovation Award respectively.

Founded in 1933, Great Bear has been a family business. Audra Fordin, the first female to operate the business after she took over from her father in 2007, explained that the shop has been a significant landmark in the neighborhood.

"I truly take pride in keeping the cars safe on the road, and keeping the people who are driving the cars safe. That's what we're really doing," said Fordin. "Customers sometimes come from far, but the community is where my family has been for four generations."

Great Bear also runs a monthly Auto workshop called "What Women Auto Know," which is free to both women and men to give the information on how to make cars last longer.

"It's designed to give you a really good understanding

of cars," she said. "There's skepticism in auto repair industry and this eliminates the misunderstanding so that you feel confident when you go to an auto shop."

According to Fordin, the auto-repair industry is broken and there are so much uneasy feelings from the consumers. She believes that educating the customers is an important step for the change long needed for the industry.

"My future goal is nationwide. This award only set me more fuel to keep going. No help is too small, that's my mission."

The winner of the Workforce Innovation Award, The Entrepreneur's Space-An Incubator for Food & Business, is a partnership between the Queens Economic Development Corporation (QEDC), Mi kitchen es su Kitchen, and other organizations such as FECS, Long Island City Business Development Corp., and NYC Business Solutions. This innovative service opened in January to offer programs and services to help launch aspiring entrepreneurs and their businesses.

"It's an incubator for food and small businesses so that they can have a place to start a business. Food businesses use the kitchen to prepare the food and products, and the small businesses use the office space to give them a first start to have a real office," said Seth Bornstein, the director of QEDC. "Also, they get counseling and assistance to start a business and understand a business."

The incubator's counseling programs, run by professionals in the industry, include the individual business counseling classes and workshops, startup business campaign programs to promote local commercial strips, and commercial programs.

"By opening the incubator, we're helping people start their business in Queens. That's the way we contribute back to the neighborhood," said Bornstein.

"We're really proud of our achievement and continue helping small businesses to make them grow," he said.