

The Business Monthly

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COLOSSEUM GYM NAMED MARYLAND SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Guys who own gyms aren't often described as "small." Places named The Colosseum aren't either. But The Colosseum Gym & Personal Training in Columbia is a small business that competes among giants, and was recently honored as the Small Business of the Year by the Maryland Chamber of Commerce.

The award was presented on June 16 during the chamber's Celebration of Small Business event at the Wyndham Baltimore Inner Harbor Hotel. "Small business is the cornerstone of our economy, not just in Maryland, but throughout the country," said Maryland Chamber Chairman Terry Neimeyer, chairman and CEO of KCI Technologies. "It is you, the entrepreneurs, who design our newest technologies, improve how we work and how we live, employ the most people and who form the very fabric of our communities."

The judging panel for the awards program was composed of representatives of some of Maryland's business media, including the Baltimore Business Journal, Washington Smart CEO magazine, the Baltimore Examiner, Maryland Public Television and Corridor Inc. The Colosseum was nominated for the award in the one to five employee category by the Howard County Chamber of Commerce.

Hidden among the many nondescript buildings on Red Branch Road, The Colosseum is unknown to many Howard County residents, yet has been in business for more than 13 years. The facility serves more than 900 members, approximately half of whom meet with a personal trainer two to three times per week.

"Personal training is clearly our niche and it helps grow our business by word-

of-mouth," commented co-owner David Sturman. "We don't spend a lot of time targeting the masses; one or two new clients per week is great for us, because they tend to stick around a long time when they see and feel results from the training."

Indeed, personal training represents the largest growth segment of the Colosseum's business. At present, 25 independent personal trainers, holding the highest credentials and certifications in



the fitness industry, train their clients at the Colosseum. Four years ago, the number of personal trainers was just 13. This growth is one of the criteria upon which the Business of the Year award was based. Other judging criteria included innovative customer service, management/marketing practices, as well as community involvement.

The final judging criterion focused on the business's ability to remain competitive. Anyone who has paid attention to the news in Howard County during the past year or two will recognize that the competition among fitness facilities in Columbia has become intense.

The stakes were raised significantly with the opening of Life Time Fitness in early 2006. The 110,000-plus-square-foot facility targets the same market as the Columbia Association (CA), the homeowners association that operates Columbia and derives significant revenue from its fitness facilities. The competition among the mammoth, well-funded facilities resulted in extensive advertising campaigns, as well as significant changes at CA, which included expanded hours of operation, incentive programs and renovations.

Tim Gallagher, Sturman's partner in The Colosseum, said, "We don't have the resources for that kind of advertising and, frankly, we're not really competing for those types of memberships. So we stuck to our core strength of personal training. We definitely lost some memberships during that time, but our personal training clients have actually increased, so it was a net gain."

In addition, The Colosseum undertook a renovation project of its own to streamline the facility and improve the open feel of the gym. "The gym has expanded several times over the years, so the space was broken up into smaller, disjointed sections. We basically knocked down all the walls within the facility and completely changed the dynamics," said Gallagher.

The Colosseum has been the recipient of several major business awards, including Small Business of the Year by the Howard County Chamber of Commerce, Maryland Small Business of the Year by the Small Business Administration and the Access Award by the Howard County Commission on Disabilities Issues.