

And They're Off: North Country Chamber honors annual award winners

By Dan Heath, Press-Republican

Email: dheath@pressrepublican.com Jan 31, 2015



Spencer ARL Plant Manager John Vermette talks about the honor of the firm being named North Country Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Year. ROB FOUNTAIN/STAFF PHOTO

PLATTSBURGH — Five winners really earned their place at the show when the North Country Chamber of Commerce celebrated its 2014 awards dinner.

The theme of Friday night's event was "And They're Off," with guests invited to dress in Kentucky Derby-themed garb, and the multiple honorees made it a great night for a photo finish.

BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

SpencerARL was named the 2014 Business of the Year. The company specializes in logistics services for the mass-transit industry, including sub-assembly work for both Nova Bus and Prevest in Plattsburgh.

"We were pretty surprised, obviously," said Plant Manager John Vermette. "The group here was pleased. It shows their effort and collaboration didn't go unnoticed."

He said he was surprised at the recognition from the chamber when there are larger operations in the area, such as Bombardier, Nova Bus and Prevest.

The company has a long history of support operations for the automotive industry through its operations in Windsor, Ontario. It was the Nova Bus plant, which opened on Banker Road in 2009, that led Spencer ARL to move into 40,000 square feet of space in Air Industrial Park. "Our first contract for this location was for Nova Bus," Vermette said.

SpencerARL has grown every year, as the scope of Nova Bus's operations have increased. That continued last year with the addition of Nova's sister company, Prevest, at the Banker Road assembly plant. While they still occupy the original location, SpencerARL also expanded into an additional 80,000-square-foot space right next door in June.

Vermette said they invested about \$1 million to get the new facility up and running.

They are still ramping up on the Prevest contract and expect to be helping that company produce one bus a day by March.

Nova Bus plans to be assembling three buses a day by the end of this year and has orders in place that call for four units a day in 2016. "It appears the market is hungry for mass transit," Vermette said.

To help satisfy the need, SpencerARL employees perform 500 major sub-assemblies each day. They put together complete systems — engines, nose caps, dashboards and more — that are then delivered to the bus plant for final assembly.

"We build 26 percent of every bus," he said.

They deliver eight to 10 fully loaded semi-trailers to Nova Bus each day, Vermette said. SpencerARL employees even work inside the Nova Bus plant to help ensure a smooth mesh between the two companies.

Spencer ARL has about 130 employees at present and expects that number to increase by as many as 20 with some new contracts this year. Vermette said the chamber, Development Corp., Empire State Development, Clinton Community College and CV-TEC have been tremendous partners in training, either through funding or actual instruction. "They have been really fantastic," he said.

The company has been supportive of workforce-development initiatives, such as the P-TECH program underway at Peru Central School and the Advanced Manufacturing Institute planned for Clinton Community College. Vermette is taking part in the Mass-Transit Cluster initiative organized by the Development Corp., which seeks to bring all facets of the process together, from education to workforce development and employers.