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Economic development group recognizes year's best companies

By James Monteleone The Daily Times

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FARMINGTON — BHP Billiton, Jack's Plastic Welding and Raytheon were awarded Thursday night with the prestigious annual Economic Development Growth and Excellence Award.

The honor is awarded by the San Juan Economic Development Service to recognize large and small companies that contribute significantly to the area economy.

The EDGE Awards are often seen as a best-practices recognition for economic base companies that are doing types of work that attract revenues from outside the community and improve the area economy through above-average payroll that largely remains in the community, San Juan Economic Development Service Director Margaret McDaniel said.

Companies are judged by a variety of performance factors, including what percentage of their business comes from products exported from San Juan County, level of production for products that replace goods that otherwise would require import to the community, competitive wages for employees and community service.

BHP Billiton New Mexico Coal operations in San Juan County employ more than 1,050 workers through its two coal mines that provide fuel to the region's power plants. The company pays nearly \$90 million to workers each year in payroll.

BHP Billiton also is a generous donor to community organizations such as San Juan United Way.

"We're very honored. ... I'm really pleased and happy for our employees. It really reflects well upon them," said Pat Risner, manager of business development for BHP

Billiton New Mexico Coal. "I think when you look at the combined impact of being the largest private employer (in San Juan County) and the payroll, and the community programs we have for the business, it does have a significant impact. We would like to hope it's a main reason why we were selected,"

A much smaller company, Jack's Plastic Welding was awarded for its economic development through its diverse range of products created at its facility in downtown Aztec and shipped across the country.

Jack's Plastic Welding was founded in 1982 as an inflatable whitewater raft manufacturer, but has since grown to add oil and gas service tools, safety equipment and made-to-order product innovations. Jack's now generates about \$800,000 in annual revenue. The business employs eight full-time workers and four additional seasonal employees during the summer, paying \$300,000 in yearly payroll.

Company owner Jack Kloepfer said he was surprised by the recognition.

"We're a small company and we have to struggle pretty hard to compete against offshore industries. But there are lot of industries that can use our service," Kloepfer said. "It's really pretty amazing."

The Raytheon Diné Facility also was awarded for the high paying jobs it creates to manufacture missile systems and equipment for the U.S. armed forces. Considering the nature of Raytheon's weapons



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