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Eleven KC-area companies among finalists for Ernst & Young's Entrepreneur of the Year

By JOYCE SMITH
The Kansas City Star

Ernst & Young LLP has named 20 finalists — 11 from the Kansas City area — for its Entrepreneur of the Year award in its Central Midwest region.

The entrepreneurs were selected by an independent judging panel of regional business, academic and community leaders. Of the 20, seven or eight winners will be revealed at a gala event June 18 at the **Sheraton Overland Park** hotel.

Ernst & Young said the local finalists are:

- Keith Molzer, president of **Balance Innovations LLC**, Lenexa.
- Charles Berkel, chairman, **Berkel & Co. Contractors Inc.**, Bonner Springs.
- Robert Hatch, chairman and chief executive officer, **Cereal Ingredients Inc.**, Leavenworth.
- Bob Cutler, CEO, **Creative Consumer Concepts (C3)**, Overland Park.
- Joe Smith, president, **Embassy Landscape Group Inc.**, Riverside.
- Bob White, president and CEO, **IDEX**, Overland Park.
- Dave Scheer, president and CEO, **Inland Truck Parts Co.**, Overland Park.
- Gary Walker, CEO and chairman, **Magic Touch Cleaning Inc.**, Lee's Summit.
- Michael Haverty, chairman and CEO, **Kansas City Southern**, Kansas City.
- F. Nicholas Franano, director, founder and chief scientific officer, and William Whitaker, vice president and general counsel, **Proteon Therapeutics Inc.**, Kansas City.
- Phillip Short, CEO, **ViraCor LLC**, Lee's Summit.

Finalists from the Central Midwest region, which encompasses Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska, were to be recognized at a reception Tuesday night at the **InterContinental Kansas City at the Plaza**.

"These finalists are the best of the best, embodying the unique spirit of entrepreneurship," Randy Buseman, Ernst & Young strategic growth markets partner for the Kansas City office, said in a statement. "They positively impact our region in a major way, through jobs, community growth and development and innovation."

Regional award winners will be eligible for consideration in Ernst & Young's national program. Winners in numerous national categories, as well as an overall national award winner, will be announced Nov. 15 in Palm Springs, Calif.

The **Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation** and **SAP America** are national sponsors. In the Central Midwest region, sponsors are the **Lockton Cos.** and *The Kansas City Star*.

To make reservations for the Central Midwest awards gala on June 18, contact Cheryl Yates of Ernst & Young at 816-480-5321 or send e-mail to cheryl.yates@ey.com by June 4. Tickets are \$150.

For more information, go to www.ey.com/us/eoy.

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