



Michael Staton
Staff writer
KENANSVILLE

2 local companies named top small businesses in NC... *Johnson Nursery in Willard and Prima Tech in Kenansville get magazine's top awards*

CHARLOTTE – Two area companies have been tagged by *Business North Carolina* magazine as top small businesses in the state for 2012.

Johnson Nursery near Wallace snagged the magazine's top honor, receiving its Small Business of the Year Award.

Prima Tech USA with headquarters near Kenansville was one of the three runners-up.

The four companies shared a similar trait. They weathered the recession years and continued to post healthy growth numbers.

Johnson Nursery owner David Johnson marked the honor by holding a dedication Friday, December 7, officially opening an expanded area of Field 8 for growing roses.

Johnson spoke briefly before family members and Latino nursery workers before asking Carl Potter, head horticulturist and production manager, to place the first two rose plants in the new field.

Potter is a big reason for the nursery's success through the years. Johnson told those assembled while an interpreter spoke in Spanish for the Latino workers.

"Due to his hard work, expertise and dedication, Carl is a vital part of the success at Johnson Nursery," Johnson said. "Carl is respected by everyone at the Johnson Nursery and a very valued team player."

With his new horticulture degree in hand, Potter was hired by Johnson Nursery in 1991 as a sprayer and grower. In 2000, he was promoted to

head horticulturist and now oversees all growers. As production manager, he "oversees much of the work done at Johnson Nursery," Johnson said.

As the top small business in North Carolina, Johnson Nursery earned an eight-page spread in *Business North Carolina*. The bright red headline blares "Back in Bloom," and it's followed by the words, "In a bleak economy, our Small Business of the Year relieved its growing pains by making color count."

A two-page photograph shows Johnson and his wife Jill standing in a field of blooming roses.

Founded in 1980, Johnson Nursery employs 90 people. The wholesale plant nursery is projected to garner \$5.5 million in revenue in 2012.

Prima Tech USA, the nation's largest maker and distributor of animal-health applicators, received a two-page spread in *Business North Carolina's* December issue. Entitled "High on the Hog", the story chronicles how owner Kim Quinn grew his company into a world leader.

"It's quite humble and an honor to be nominated as a top small business in the state," Quinn said. "I didn't expect to be nominated."

Quinn grew up on a farm in Warsaw where his family raised turkeys, cattle and pigs. "My family owned a farm, and I worked on it a couple of years," Quinn is quoted in the article. "I didn't enjoy it. So I decided if I was going to live where I grew up, I was going to have to find something else."

What eventually led to Prima Tech USA and more than \$10 million in revenue projected for 2012 were inexpensive plastic syringes for vaccinating livestock. He sold them from the trunk of his car in 1995, generating about \$250,000 in sales.

Nowadays Quinn employs about 40 people, 25 of them full time, and sells such items as polyurethane boots and gloves. Applicators, though, remain about 60 percent of the company's sales. A third of sales come from exports.

For a while assembly took place in New Zealand, but the assembly operation returned to the U.S. in 2003.

"Now we'll an exporting company," Quinn is quoted in the magazine. "We're brining jobs back to the United States."

The other two runners-up were Fuentek, LLC in Apex and New Finish, Inc. in Norwood.

In the Small Business of the Year competition, the magazine's editors selected eight finalists from 60 entries. Three judges selected the winner and three runners-up. The judges were: Stan Mandel, director of the Angell Center for Entrepreneurship at Wake Forest University; Shane Cooper, CEO of last year's winner, Defect International in Hildebran, and magazine publisher Ben Kinney.

Michael Staton can be reached at mstaton@ncweeklies.com or 910-619-8540.