

Secret to their success

Knowing its strengths helps company give back to community

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By **MEG DEDOLPH** Staff writer

After a few years of saying yes to local organizations asking for donations, Bill and Karen Garlough of My Chef Catering said they decided to take a more organized approach.

"You say yes to a lot of things, and after four or five years, you think, should this be more structured?" Karen said. "So we selected a core group of organizations we wanted to support."

Picking your causes was among the advice the Garloughs gave when they spoke Friday morning on a panel that was part of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Small Business Summit in Washington, D.C.

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My Chef Catering won the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Small Business of the Year Award on Thursday night in Washington, D.C. Karen Garlough, left, and Bill Garlough, right, accepted the award.

Sun file

The couple won the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Small Business of the Year Award, which judges businesses on community involvement, among other criteria.

Karen also suggested that business owners who want to volunteer more in their community look at their own strengths - she used her experience in event planning to help organize a fundraiser.

"If you have certain talents, try to use those talents to do the best you can," she said.

She said she prefers donating time to money.

"Giving of your time and your services seems to be more meaningful than writing a check," she said. "Money's always nice, but I think that one-on-one kind of face time is meaningful."

The Garloughs and Wayne Gatewood, owner of Quality Support Inc., a Maryland company specializing in business logistics, agreed that it's hard to be community-minded when you've just launched a business.

"Realistically, when you start out, you're trying to pay the bills," Karen said. "You're looking to survive those first few years. When you're starting out, you don't have the resources."

Gatewood described how, while he was starting his business, he also was volunteering at a jail, working with inmates, and although he was often tired, he found the volunteer work helpful.

"When we're doing those kinds of things, it takes us away from our own problems," he said.

Both business owners agreed that, although they started volunteering in the community because they felt it was a moral imperative, the work they did had a positive effect on their business.

"Most business owners know you have to create buzz," Bill Garlough said, adding that publicity they've gotten from their volunteer work helps to generally publicize the business.