

BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU  
*Business of the Year Awards*  
2004  
PRESENTED BY U.S. BANK

**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **THE HOWARD GROUP WINS BUSINESS OF THE YEAR AWARD**

*Western Washington Business Recognized for Excellence in the Marketplace*

**Seattle, WA – January 2005** —The Howard Group, Inc., who produces high school graduation parties throughout Washington, has been voted the 2004 Business of the Year for **Western Washington in the Small Business Category**.

“The Business of the Year Awards is designed to honor businesses like The Howard Group,” said Robert W.G. Andrew, CEO and President of the Better Business Bureau, “the dedication to customers, employees and the community they serve is admired.”

In 1975 Kevin Howard St. John began helping parents create events whose purpose was to keeping graduating high school seniors safe on graduation night. In 1983 the Howard Group officially formed Grad Nights – the first Alcohol and drug free graduation event planning service in the country. Grad Nights literally revolutionized the post graduation celebration in Washington, taking it from a legacy of underage drinking and driving to a standard of alcohol free celebration and wonderful memories.

“Our graduation party business is truly remarkable and gratifying”, says company founder Kevin Howard St. John. “We save kids lives by throwing terrific parties. It doesn’t get much better than that!” Susan McKee, The Howard Group Director of Operations adds “The number one cause of death for an 18 year old today is an automobile accident. The number one cause of automobile accidents is drunk drivers. Across the country, on graduation night, the death toll spirals out of control. But not in Washington, not anymore, not since Kevin started Grad Nights.”

Of course, The Howard Group does more than graduation parties, since it’s inception in 1983, they have developed into a full event production company servicing corporate, private and social events.

The Howard Group received this year’s award after an intensive review of their business conduct and practices focusing on four key areas: Customer Service, Community Involvement, Innovative Business Practices and Integrity.

When asked about their standard of customer service, Kevin Howard St. John, President of The Howard Group, explains, “For our clients, the journey to the destination is often as important as the destination itself. We believe that no matter how good our final product may be (the destination); if our customer service (the journey) isn’t equally as great, the final result can be a disappointed client.”

Referring to their community involvement, St. John went on to say, “At The Howard Group, we see ourselves as part of the fabric of the community. The life-cycle events that comprise so much of what we do are often the blocks upon which our community is built - weddings, religious celebrations, rites of passage, etc. We are committed to volunteering both our time and our resources to causes that support our community.”

All of the Better Business of Year Award finalists were industry leaders, demonstrating a number of innovative business practices, an important category for this year’s judges. The Howard Group was no exception, noting a variety of local and national firsts as part of its innovative programs. Toby Brown, Director of Corporate Affairs for The Howard Group, commented that “The events industry is full of competitors, large – small – and in between. We distinguish ourselves from the competition we embracing a policy of constant innovation and change. We recognize that what we are doing today, our competition will be emulating and doing tomorrow – so tomorrow we must be prepared to do something different.”

The final area that this year’s judges considered was perhaps the most important: Integrity. Integrity seemed to be the theme for the awards banquet as key note speaker addressed the issue directly with his presentation “Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead”.

According to Kevin Howard St. John, “Integrity means steadfastly adhering to our personal and professional standards that are based upon treating our customers, suppliers and employees in a morally responsible manner. It often means going beyond what is contractually promised or legally required and doing what is right.” Sounds good to us.

#### **ABOUT THE BBB**

The Better Business Bureau is a non-profit organization funded by BBB member companies. The mission of the BBB is to promote the highest ethical marketplace relationships through self-regulation, education and information. Every day the BBB receives more than 6,500 inquiries through their website and phone lines. For more information on the services and products provided by the BBB, visit them at 333 SW 5th Avenue, Suite 406, Portland, OR 97204; or visit them online at [www.thebbb.org](http://www.thebbb.org) or call (503) 226-3981

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