

life

■ WOMEN IN BUSINESS: Top award

Chapman's: From six to 350 workers

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Next door to that facility, ground has already been broken on a 20-acre plot of land two blocks from the original headquarters and Chapman says the goal is to have "Project Phoenix" complete by April 1, when all production will be once again under one roof in Markdale.

In the meantime, Chapman has farmed out the rest of her production to smaller, independent operators in southern Ontario, primarily in Stoney Creek and Belleville. Using their own staff, Chapman's has gone to great lengths to pay for transportation to and from the facilities, as well as hotel accommodations and food.

It's these actions, and her 36-year history with the company that she helped grow from six employees to 350, that earned Penny the title of Business Woman of the Year at the 6th annual Women in Business Awards held last week.

"This year what really set her apart from the others was that she was truly tested and she rose to the occasion," Cheryl McMenemy, Sun Times publisher and chair of the judges panel, said.

"Beyond that the judges felt her involvement in the community and her commitment to businesses besides her own was worthy of the award."

The Chapmans moved to Markdale in 1973 where they purchased and refurbished an old creamery. Along with their two children, they lived in the cramped quarters above their business for several years balancing life and work.

"I still can't believe how big we got. We grew from nothing to the biggest independent operator in Canada, it was a gradual process, but we worked at it," said Chapman.

"When we first decided to move here I'd never even heard of Markdale, but now I could never go back. After the fire, it's hard to believe the kindness we've been shown by the community and things people will do just to make us smile."

The Chapman's have long been committed to Markdale, resisting buyouts from mega-ice cream companies over the years because, they say, they knew they would pull the operation out of the small town.

"The business has been our

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Penny Chapman

life and we still enjoy it, despite everything that's happened recently," said Chapman.

Immediately following the fire, the Chapmans purchased a vacant building across the street from where they worked for 36 years and moved their offices into the cramped space.

Chapman shares her office space with her son, Ashley, the company's vice-president. But spacious office quarters are the least of her worries, says Chapman, it's getting production back up to speed with their own recipes, using their own equipment operated by Chapman's Ice Cream staff that is her focus.

"Right now our focus is on production, production, production. We'll worry about office space later on," she said.



WILLY WATERTON The Sun Times

Penny Chapman inside the temporary plant where production of ice cream began this week.