

Two tech awards go to Highland residents

BY JAMES JACENICH • STAFF WRITER

WILLIAMSVILLE — Frank and Judy Marks of Williamsville and Robin Sullenberger of Mill Gap received technology awards at the Shenandoah Valley Technology Council Awards Gala March 5. The Marks earned the High Tech Entrepreneur Award and Sullenberger earned the High Tech Leadership Award. The Highland County Economic Development Authority nominated them.

Frank and Judy Marks are not seeking publicity. They like their simple, quiet, country life. It's a nice counterbalance to the high tech global marketplace their business takes them to.

Their home and business sit atop a knoll on the Burnsville Road. A gravel driveway meanders up to two, small, nondescript buildings that house the family business. A few hundred yards away is a simple house and garage. A sliding door is affixed to the garage roof, barely noticeable from a distance.

Frank started a garage business in 1988 and introduced the GeoVISION system in 1989 for use in wells. Today, Marks Products, Inc. employs nine people. Frank built a borehole camera system for the water-well industry that is used around the world. Last year the company introduced the GeoVISION Nano, the smallest camera the company makes. It is about the size of a fountain pen and can be used to a depth of 2,000 feet.

He has patents for mounting brackets on his RearView VISION monitoring system for recreational vehicles, for his Search Vision under-vehicle inspection videos, and for his GeoVISION bore hole cameras. The company licensed Wintron Technologies to manufacture and sell its RearViewVISION product line in 2001.

"It was a surprise to get this award," said Frank. "The award is very appreciated. We feel like we are a small fish, but it has been a labor of love."

He married Judy in 1987 and ever since she has been coming with him to Highland. "I think the award is wonderful," she said. "It's nice to have recognition. We appreciate the community for its recognition and support."

Marks previously worked for MGW in the 1970s and has been a frequent visitor to Highland since 1966. He moved to Harrisonburg in 1981, where he worked for several years in the technology industry, and later worked in Luray. The Marks moved full-time to Highland in 2004.

Marks likes caving and motorcycle riding, activities he can do in Highland. That strange door on his garage roof conceals a telescope in the attic. Marks is an amateur astronomer and his hobby benefits from the relatively dark skies of Highland. However, he said the lights from Staunton are starting to affect Highland's nighttime sky, as is the proliferation of dusk to dawn outdoor lights in the county.

Frank likes the Highland county work environment. "It's nice to look out the windows at the beautiful mountains." He joked he had to put blinds up on the windows to keep the employees from daydreaming.

Marks has some ideas about how to attract more businesses like his to the county. He would like faster Internet service. "We have DSL, but it is still not fast enough," he said. "We have fiber optics. The county needs to push to get as good a service as it can."

Marks said a small manufacturing business like his could do better than retail businesses because it doesn't need a storefront.

Technology businesses could also flourish in Highland

because of its better-educated population, both as potential employees and social companions for people who would come here to start a business or work here.

"Looking at Highland, you have a very intellectual group of people," Judy said. "It's a wonderful foundation — high number of college graduates, retired business people — the local population is wonderful. It has a hometown feel. There's a writer's group, reading group, quilters, garden club — plenty of activities."

The Marks are also members of the Monterey Lions Club. Just last week they manned the Lions' pork rind booth, a major fundraiser for the community service organization.

"Everybody knows everybody, there's a home feeling, anybody needs anything they are there," said Judy.

Sullenberger is the Chief Executive Officer of the Shenandoah Valley Partnership in Harrisonburg. As CEO, he plays a vital role in expanding economic development in the region.

Sullenberger and SVP worked with SRI Shenandoah, a biosciences company, and helped it establish its Center for Advanced Drug Research at the Rockingham Center for Research and Technology.

Also in conjunction with SRI, Sullenberger and SVP developed the Shenandoah Valley 21st Century Workforce Transitions project. The project will prepare local workers for the skills and specializations they will need to find work in the region's new enterprises.

The SVTC also recognized Sullenberger for his leadership in extending broadband capabilities to rural Virginia as a member of the Commonwealth Broadband Roundtable.

Sullenberger is a member of the Highland County Board of Supervisors and is married to Sherry Sullenberger.

No candidates up for town election, again

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MONTEREY — The March 4 filing deadline is past and no one registered to have his or her name put on the ballot this year for town council or mayor of Monterey.



Monterey Town Council met last Thursday, as they do every first