

Waikato's best in business celebrated at glittering gala dinner

Waikato's business community shone brightly at last night's Waikato Chamber of Commerce Business Awards Gala Dinner, held in Hamilton, as outstanding enterprises and leaders from across the region were recognised for their achievements.

In a glittering evening attended by more almost 800 business and civic leaders, RML Machinery was named Supreme Award winner, capping off a remarkable night in which they also took home the Innovation Award for their pioneering work in automated guided vehicles. Other major winners included Fiona Michel of Braemar Hospital (CEO of the Year) and Claire Williamson of My Mortgage (Emerging Leader of the Year), reflecting the strength of leadership and entrepreneurial talent in the region.

Chamber CEO Don Good said the awards showcased the exceptional calibre and diversity of Waikato's business sector.

"These winners are a testament to the incredible talent and vision that define our region," Good said.

"From dynamic young entrepreneurs to established industry leaders, Waikato businesses are showing what's possible with innovation, perseverance, and a genuine commitment to people and community. And let's be clear – innovation is the best way out of a recession as it is a durable competitive advantage. And RML are exceptional when it comes to innovation."

Head judge Dr Heather Connolly praised the high standard of entries and the readiness of Waikato firms to break new ground.

"It was inspiring to see companies pushing boundaries in technology, sustainability, and culture. This year's winners not only delivered impressive results but also led with empathy and purpose, setting a strong example for others to follow," she said.

Fiona Michel's career spans banking, insurance, energy, policing, technology, and health. She has built a reputation for leading with both head and heart. Judges described her as a values-driven and commercially astute leader with a clear commitment to equity and excellence. Her leadership style balances compassion with accountability, earning her the respect of staff and peers alike.

Claire Williamson was applauded by judges for her bold, values-driven leadership and her commitment to empowering both her team and her community. Described as energetic, authentic, and purpose-focused, Claire has built My Mortgage into a dynamic business known not only for its financial expertise but also for its genuine care for people. Judges said her entrepreneurial agility – evident in the company's expansion into insurance and content creation – showcases her ability to innovate and adapt in a rapidly changing environment.

Good also highlighted the success of South Waikato company Satco, which took out the international trade award.

"South Waikato has seen some tough times recently with factory closures and hundreds of job losses. So to see Satco shine on the international stage is heartening indeed."

In addition to the headline awards, category winners included:

- Best Emerging Business: Pact Steel

- Business Growth & Strategy: Bettle-Associates
- Community Contribution: Action Manufacturing
- For Purpose: Braemar Charitable Trust
- International Trade: Satco
- Marketing: Waikato Milking Systems
- People & Culture: Kmart Ruakura Distribution Centre
- Service Excellence: TOLBECS Ear Clinic
- Sustainability: Action Manufacturing

Both Don Good and Dr Connolly extended their congratulations to all finalists, thanking sponsors and the judges' panel for their dedication to honouring Waikato's leading lights.

Notes to editors:

Winners will be listed on this webpage at 10.30pm Friday.

<https://waikatochamber.co.nz/2025-wba-winners/>

Photos will be available via this link at midday Saturday.

https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipPkPtWBvdYNOhi2LKQMWAGd5qGW1WzHFm8PX8_nWcDJF-DCgpgkfnAKrdPzgsVoMg?key=RLRsbVFOM0tMRjFoeU83MmpTNIAtM1JTNzBENm9B