

NEWS RELEASE

Kathleen Sebelius, Governor
Howard Fricke, Secretary



June 2, 2005

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A PITTSBURG COMPANY WINS PRESTIGIOUS GOVERNOR'S AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

The winner of the top business award in the state is **Watco Companies, Inc.** of **Pittsburg, Kansas**. Governor Kathleen Sebelius presented the company with the 2005 Kansas Governor's Award of Excellence. It is the eleventh year of the award.

The presentation was made at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Topeka during the annual Kansas Cavalry Encampment. The event traditionally kicks off Kansas Business Appreciation Month, an annual tribute to Kansas businesses sponsored by the Kansas Department of Commerce (Commerce) and supported by the Kansas Cavalry.

"Watco Companies, Inc. is a remarkable company that truly exemplifies Kansas values," said Governor Sebelius. "I am proud to recognize this exceptional Kansas business, not only for the jobs and educational opportunities it provides its employees, but also for its commitment to area schools and the Pittsburg community."

Watco Companies Inc. is a successful Kansas business that started in 1983, with fewer than 10 employees, and has grown rapidly to the 1,200 employees it has today. Family owned and operated, the corporate office is located in Pittsburg, Kansas.

Watco Companies, Inc. provides multiple rail services through various subsidiaries via 12 railroads nationwide, two of them covering more than 1,000 miles in Kansas. The company also provides a variety of rail services and locomotive repair and maintenance services. Watco Companies, Inc. actively supports multiple area schools through leadership, financial contributions, and employee participation. The company also donates employee labor and passenger train rides for many community events including Little Balkans Days, a variety of local grade school events, and a traditional Santa train.

In 2002, Watco Companies initiated the creation of Port of Pittsburg. This port was established to preserve and protect current rail assets while creating additional ones. The Port of Pittsburg was awarded \$500,000 tax credit to achieve these goals.

"We have wonderful employees all over the United States, but the Midwest is the place to be," said Kaye Lynne Webb, Co-Founder of Watco Companies, Inc. "Kansas is a place where people are still honest, they are hard workers, and this is a place where a handshake still means something."

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Governor's Award of Excellence

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Watco Companies, Inc. was one of five finalists for the 2005 Governor's Award of Excellence. The other finalists were: Lowen Corporation, Hutchinson; Gray & Rosel, Ulysses; Rural Telephone Service Co. Inc./Nex-Tech, Lenora; and Dr.'s Hawks, Besler & Rogers.

The finalists for the Governor's Award of Excellence were chosen from 274 companies nominated for recognition during Kansas Business Appreciation Month, celebrated in June. An independent panel of chamber of commerce officials, economic development professionals, and business people from across the state selected the finalists.

In addition to honoring the winner of the Kansas Governor's Award of Excellence, Commerce officials travel across the state in June to pay tribute to hundreds of Kansas businesses for the significant contributions they make to their local communities and to the state. Business Appreciation Month ceremonies are taking place in Topeka (June 3), Wamego (June 3), Kansas City (June 7), Iola (June 9), Colby (June 14), Dodge City (June 15), and Wellington (June 21).

For more information about Kansas Business Appreciation Month, contact Kristy Druse at (785) 296-3805 or kdruse@kansascommerce.com. Information on regional award winners will also be available on the Commerce web site at www.kansascommerce.com -- enter connect code: **KBAMMEDIA**.

Funding for Business Appreciation Month activities is provided by the Economic Development Initiatives Fund (EDIF), which is derived from state lottery proceeds, and also by the Kansas Cavalry, a volunteer group whose members support economic development and serve as business ambassadors for the state.

The mission of the Kansas Department of Commerce is to empower business and communities through bold leadership using strategic resources to realize prosperity in Kansas.