



# *NEWS RELEASE*

## MAINE DISTRICT OFFICE

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### **JSI STORE FIXTURES CO-OWNER MARK AWALT IS NAMED SBA/S MAINE SMALL BUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR**

Augusta, Maine -- Mark S. Awalt, Co-Owner and Vice President of JSI Store Fixtures, is the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) Maine, Small Business Person of the Year for 2004. Awalt exemplifies the business expertise, commitment, creativity, and community involvement sought in the selection of one of the nation's top entrepreneurs.

Incorporated in 1991, JSI began in the basement of the family home manufacturing store display fixtures for Hannaford. Today JSI is Milo's largest private employer and manufactures high-end wood and steel displays for the supermarket industry. It is owned by Mark Awalt, brothers Terry Awalt and Barry Awalt and stepfather Clayton Johndro. "We all have different talents and abilities. The sum of our whole is much greater than the sum of our parts," said Mark. "Our team of 75 employees and their commitment to servicing our customers is the most important ingredient to our success. We are like a huge family and operate our business as such," he added.

After serving in the U.S. Army and graduating from the University of Maine, Mark worked for seven years at Maine Yankee Atomic Power while earning an MBA from Thomas College and a CEBS designation from the Wharton School.

Mark Awalt joined his family at JSI in 1997. At this time the company had outgrown the 30,000 square foot manufacturing space in Howland and needed a new facility. Mark sought the help of the Maine Small Business Development Center at Eastern Maine Development Corporation and the Piscataquis County Economic Development Council. With hard work, determination and management assistance from these resources, JSI received a community development block grant, a SBA guaranteed loan and gap financing from Eastern Maine Development Corporation and moved to former Dexter Shoe Plant in Milo in 2000.

Mark is a prime example of a determined business owner using local resources and technical assistance to achieve the American Dream of business ownership and entrepreneurial success.

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JSI's primary customers are major supermarket chains including Hannaford, Shaw's, Food Lion, Price Chopper, Giant Food Stores, Stop n' Shop, Top's Markets, and Pathmark. JSI also sells to a few retail chains including L.L. Bean and Home Depot.

Mark is among 53 top small business persons – one from each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico/Virgin Islands, and Guam who will be honored by the SBA at the SBA Expo '04, celebrating National Small Business Week in Orlando, Florida, in May. "To be chosen one of 53 outstanding small businesses nationwide is a tribute to Mark's entrepreneurial qualities," stated Mary E. McAleney, Maine District Director for the SBA.

The SBA Maine District Office will honor Mark at an awards celebration May 25<sup>th</sup> at Spectacular Event Center, 395 Griffin Road in Bangor.

For additional information on the 2004 award winners and the awards celebration, please contact Bonnie Erickson at 207-622-8275 or Sandra Fontaine at 207-622-8381.