

BUSINESS SOUTH-EAST

New era for the best in business

By CASEY NEILL

Greater Dandenong's top business awards have entered a new era.

A breakfast launched the new Greater Dandenong Chamber Business Awards at Greyhounds Entertainment in Springvale on Wednesday 25 May.

Health educator and former AFL player and coach David Parkin was the morning's guest speaker.

NAB's Paul Wood presented the first two award nominees, Breadwinner and India At Home.

He said there were more than 12,500 businesses in Dandenong and the awards' predecessor, the Premier Regional Business Awards (PRBA) which wrapped up on 13 April, highlighted about 400 over its 25 years.

"There's a lot more good stories to tell," he said.

The chamber's executive committee will select 12 businesses to showcase at breakfasts throughout the year.

An award presentation in November will include a Greater Dandenong Chamber Award and five category awards.

Businesses with 25 employees or less or an annual turnover less than \$10 million will be eligible for the Small Business Award, with those exceeding these figures in the Large Business category.

Businesses that make and sell products to the general public will be in the running for the Retail Award, and the Employment Award will recognise a business that actively develops and trains staff beyond their employment field or employs from marginal communities.

The Corporate Social Responsibility and Innovation Award will go to a business that takes into account the social, ethical, and environmental effects of its activities on its staff and community.

Breadwinner produces up to 40,000 sandwiches a day and started in 1997 when John Welsh turned to electrician friend Maarten Pinkster



NAB's Paul Wood with India At Home owner Rajesh Bhatia. 154713

to keep up with his contract catering company's growth.

"We needed some expertise in the organisational side of the business," Mr Welsh said.

Breadwinner has been in Dandenong for 20 years, employs more than 100 people - with an-

other 30 to come on board by Christmas - and has a turnover approaching \$20 million.

It creates handmade sandwiches for 7-Eleven, Starbucks, the MCG, Tennis Australia and more, and last year won the 7-Eleven supplier of the year award.

"When you think of the companies supplying them, it was quite a buzz," Mr Welsh said.

"The strength of our business is really our people. Dandenong has a great wealth of opportunity.

"We find great loyalty. We've got people who've worked for us for 15 years.

"We treat people like family and we've found that's been effective."

Rajesh Bhatia came to Australia as a student in 1995 and learnt that "profit is the reward of risk-taking".

He saw a gap in the market for everyday Indian food and opened Dandenong's India At Home in 2004.

"I took the maximum loan I could take on my home," he said.

"We took a risk, we worked hard and we made it."

Mr Bhatia worked seven days a week for the business's first five years, and now has 40 employees and eight retail stores selling more than 5000 products.

Mr Parkin, a prostate cancer survivor, urged breakfast guests to find out their genetic history.

He watched the disease beat his father and grandfather so was on the lookout for it and received early treatment.

"You're a fool if you don't know," he said.

Mr Parkin also spoke about encouraging physical education in primary schools.

"We need to do it at the time when we're forming the habits of our lives," he said.

He shared his 'simple seven' rules to live by - eat right, know your optimal weight, get regular skin checks, look after yourself (he labelled drugs, smoking and alcohol "poison"), look after your mates, activity is the best supplement and life's about balance.

"You've got to find something that you love to get your head out of everything that's going on," he said.

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 BUSINESS — India At Home
 Dandenong 2004
 Owner — RAJESH BHATIA