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HEADLINE: Gagne's rock-solid success earns Chamber award

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BELGRADE -- In the main office of **Gagne & Son's** sits a clunky, old Montgomery-Ward block-making machine. While it's not so high-tech now, the simple block-maker helped a small, family-owned business grow from manufacturing 100 concrete blocks a day to about 20,000.

It's because of that hard work and growth that **Gagne & Son** Concrete Block and Maine Hardscape Center was chosen as the 2007 Business of the Year, said Peter Thompson, president and chief executive officer of the Kennebec Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Peter **Gagne**, vice president of manufacturing, along with his sister, Linda **Gagne-Boucher**, vice president of operations, will be honored during an awards ceremony at the Augusta Civic Center on Jan. 26.

"We couldn't be more pleased," **Gagne-Boucher** said. "We're elated, proud, excited. This award makes all the tough times worthwhile."

Gagne & Son got its start in 1945, when Alfred **Gagne**, an Augusta carpenter, mason, handyman and **Gagne-Boucher's** grandfather, began making concrete blocks one by one on that same block machine in his family's Washington Street garage.

Alfred **Gagne's son**, Albert "Pete" **Gagne**, Linda and Peter's father, grew the company from 1959 until his death in 1997.

"The company started out with less than 10 people," **Gagne-Boucher** said. "Now we have over 100."

And instead of just selling concrete block, **Gagne & Son** also has a full line of construction, masonry and landscape supplies.

Gagne-Boucher and her brother began working for the family business while still in high school.

After their father passed away, **Gagne-Boucher** said, a decision had to be made about the company.

"We had to decide whether to stick with it or not," **Gagne-Boucher** said. "We just did not want to see the years of Dad's and our hard work fall by the wayside. So we said, 'let's see what we can do with it.'"

Gagne & Son products have been used to build nearly every Wal-Mart, Home Depot and Lowe's store in the state, as well as the new Cony High School and the new Kennebec Valley YMCA.

Over the years, the business went from having one location to seven retail locations in Belgrade, Auburn, Westbrook, Saco, Kittery, Topsham and Naples.

In 2005, a 35,000-square-foot, computer-controlled block plant came on-line, turning out four concrete blocks every eight and a half seconds.

Gagne & Son's Saco and Kittery retail stores also were purchased. Construction is underway on a new retail store in Belgrade on Route 27, in front of the current manufacturing plant.

Gagne & Son also has a new division named Maine Hardscape Centers, which provides products such as pavers, retaining wall blocks, granite and natural stone, as well as equipment needed by do-it-yourselfers.

But the brother-sister duo won't take all the credit for the success of their family's business.

"The success of the business really depends on our employees," **Gagne-Boucher** said. "There is no way we're doing this all on our own. They are loyal, hardworking, dedicated employees. Without any question whatsoever, it's because of them that we're here."

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