



NEWS

Labor commissioner honors AEV

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Industrial workers at American Emergency Vehicles are the safest in the county and among the safest in the state.

The internationally renowned ambulance manufacturer has been presented the coveted Carolina Star Award by Commissioner of Labor Cherie Berry. A special ceremony was held Wednesday at the facility in Jefferson.

Berry praised AEV for its safety record and efforts to ensure protection of workers. "A lot of plants do one thing, like cabinets or wiring, but you do all that and much more," she said to a gathering of workers, staff and special guests. "It is difficult to do all those disciplines under one roof and maintain safety."

"AEV is the largest and most powerful and efficient ambulance producing plant in the U.S.," said Chief Executive Officer Mark Van Arnam, noting that the Carolina Star Award is "not something the building did or the company did but what the people did. It's about you guys and what you've done. This is a great time for AEV and I'm glad you could all be a part of it."

For 16 years, AEV has custom designed and built ambulances for customers around the world. A team of over 325 employees builds approximately 20 percent of the ambulances produced in the United States and builds and delivers high quality vehicles for EMS systems in many other countries.

This year the company will deliver approximately 1,100 vehicles throughout the country and abroad. These vehicles will travel 275 million miles during their lifetimes transporting 11 million patients. AEV assembles these ambulances with lifesaving tools for the EMS workers.

"Our job is to allow EMS people to do their work and to protect the EMS workers," said Van Arnam. "We are known today for producing the safest ambulances on the street, the Volvo of ambulances, which has served us well in the market."

It's only natural, Van Arnam said, for a company as it grows to take a look at itself and its safety record. AEV's in-house safety record was not growing as fast as the company, he said, so he decided to do something about it. John Widden came on board several years ago as a safety coach and his team worked with employees to create a safer environment for everyone.

There were advanced procedures available so John brought all this to life, said Van Arnam. He spent several years looking at higher levels of safety training and working with OSHA, then told Van Arnam that they needed to be Star rated. "So we started the road to Star and took it seriously," Van Arnam said. "Eventually everyone caught on and we finally made it, and that's what today is all about. At the end of the



North Carolina Commissioner of Labor Cherie Berry visited American Emergency Vehicles in Jefferson on Wednesday to present the Carolina Star Award for safety to the company. The special ceremony included guests from county and town government and businesses in the county all gathered to salute the hard work of this company's 325 employees and management to achieve the best safety record in the county and among the best in the state. (Post Photo by Linda Burchette)

day, employees get home safe to their families and that's what it's all about."

Berry said there are only a small number of Carolina Star Award companies in the state, about 102 of the approximately 250,000 companies that do business in the state. Safety records have been improving in North Carolina over the past five years, she said, with 2007 having the largest ever decrease in fatalities on the job. "Zero is what we're after, and we work hard every day to get there," she said. "AEV is the first in Ashe County to achieve this award, and they've set the bar for everyone else. It means so much to the state."

Berry said that nothing is more important than safety on the job and she praised AEV for their achievement. It takes a strong commitment from the employees and from management, she said, to achieve this status. "When we can eliminate injuries to employees that is the real reward to employees, and it spills over to everything else in their lives," she said. And that is good for business.

Prior to the ceremony, Van Arnam and his management staff led Berry and other officials on a tour of the plant. Visitors included NC Rep. Cullie Tarleton and government and business leaders from Ashe County, Jefferson, West Jefferson and Lansing.

"AEV is one of those homegrown Ashe County businesses with a worldwide impact," said Tarleton. "With a payroll in excess of 10 million dollars, AEV is a major economic force among Ashe County industries. Thanks to your innovative spirit and strong work ethic, we are here today to celebrate your achievements. These people did it the old fashioned way; they earned it."

The congratulations extended to Myrt Hall, safety manager, John Widden, safety coach, and Rebecca Israel, Carolina Star team leader.

"It is impressive and I am proud to be a part of this team here today," said Hall. "We did it. We can be proud of what we've done. Special thanks to this team. We got an award we can really be proud of. It's a privilege."

"I get to say congratulations, but I also get to say, I told you so! Didn't I?" said Israel. "You made a commitment to stand behind the company."

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