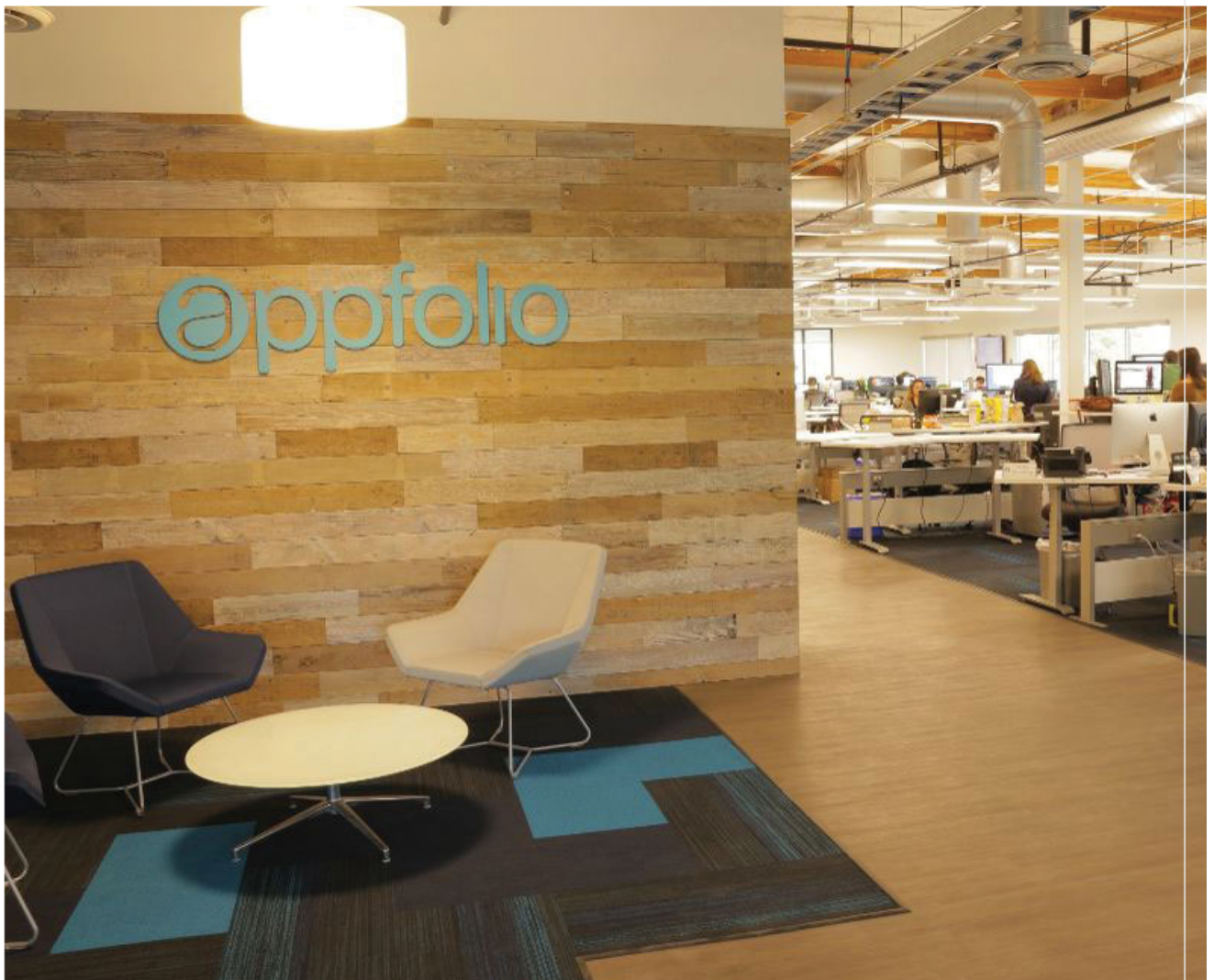


You are here: [Home](#) > [Education](#) > [Current Article](#)

Best of South Coast businesses, entrepreneurs honored

By Marissa Nall / Friday, March 10th, 2017 / [No Comments](#)

[Share](#) [Print](#) [Email](#)



AppFolio is the Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara's "Company of the Year."

The Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara has announced the winners of the 23rd South Coast Business & Technology Awards, which highlight companies that have contributed to the economic vitality of the region.

"This year is no exception — from a successful business founder who now seeds it forward as an angel investor, to two entrepreneurs who have put Central Coast beer making on the map, to a world-class film festival — the 2017 honorees represent the best of local leadership and ingenuity," said Renee Grubb, who co-chaired the volunteer Steering Committee for the awards.

More than 700 guests attend the event, including dozens of corporate sponsors, making it a funding source for scholarships to regional universities and community colleges in business and technology fields.

The foundation has awarded more than \$2 million to students, who frequently wind up working in related industries in the region, Grubb said.

Winning in the Excellence in Service category, the Santa Barbara International Film Festival is in its 32nd year of hosting viewings, industry panels and events.

In the midst of a \$5 million capital campaign, the organization acquired a 30-year lease on the Riviera Theater and began remodeling it in January. It hopes to open the location in May to show independent films year-round and conduct educational programs for students, adults and seniors, in conjunction with nonprofits like Easylift and Girls Inc.

"We approach everything from an educational standpoint," said Managing Director Sean Pratt. "We get big notable directors for animated films to come and inspire kids that filmmaking is more than just entertainment, it can be an educational tool and a career in the arts."

With a stated goal to be known as the No. 1 educational film festival in the country, the group conducted a national search for its new directors of advancement and education, who are working to expand and scale up those programs, Pratt said, and will be hiring a theater staff in May to join its eight employees and large seasonal staff.

"Every film festival has some sort of educational program but we're no longer just a once a year event, we're a year-round organization," he said.

The Entrepreneur of the Year award goes to founders and builders with a career of successful entrepreneurial endeavors as well as vision, leadership, ethics and achievement in business or technological innovation. This year, the recognition goes to David Walker and Adam Firestone, the founders of the brewing company that bears their names.

"This is the first time that we have partnered with the foundation, and it's a tremendous honor," Walker said. "The work that the foundation does to foster higher education opportunities for local students is a true gift to our community. They are growing the entrepreneurs of tomorrow."

Established two decades ago, the company had more than 500 employees and broke ground on an expansion at its headquarters in Paso Robles in 2016.

"This year we became a top 10 American craft brewer. We have come a long way from making our beer in a converted shed in the back-forty of the family vineyard," Walker said.

Highlighted for its product development, strong financial performance and attraction of outside investment, this year's Company of the Year award went to Santa Barbara real estate software developer AppFolio. The company announced new services in 2016 and had grown to 18,000 customers and \$28 million in revenues by the end of the year.

"The thing that we're really focused on is understanding our customers and their business better than anybody else and then really delivering great software and great services that help our customers run a better business, become more profitable and grow," CEO Brian Donahoo said.

Since its founding 10 years prior, the company has attended the awards event in support of the foundation.

"We're big fans of the foundation because of the scholarships they give to students and the impact they have for education," Donahoo said. "To get this award in our hometown feels good."

Executive of the Year James Takayesu, president and CEO of Tecolote Research, disputed his claim to the award, attributing his company's success to its team and its customer focus.

"I'm not sure it's an accurate portrayal. If it was the Executive Team of the Year or the Fortunate Guy of the Year, that would make sense," Takayesu said. "This award is truly more a tribute to the success of Tecolote rather than a recognition of me."

Owned by its employees, the share value for Tecolote has grown more than 1,400 percent in its lifetime, he said, now employing more than 500 people nationwide and bringing in revenues of more than \$100 million.

"It's been nice to see that people are able to share in that fortune and many have been able to retire with that," Takayesu said. "It's a group venture. We're not focused on only growing. We're focused on trying to build a place where we can have a skilled staff and an environment

for them to grow in.”

The 2017 Pioneer Award winner took the success of the information technology company he founded, and created the Santa Barbara Angel Alliance “not just to make money but to play a role in an organization with significant positive impact in the world,” he said.

John Petote, founder of the Alliance, said it offers hands-on support and help for companies that don’t have much experience. Though it’s a high-risk endeavor, “we can make these companies more successful and put the odds more on their side.”

When he was younger, the Boys and Girls club helped point him in the right direction, Petote said, and as one of five children, his parents didn’t have enough money to send all of his siblings to a university.

“If not for organizations like that and the Scholarship Foundation and a number of others, kids might not go in the right direction,” he said. “If you’re a smart kid and you don’t have the opportunity to maximize your natural intelligence, society suffers because these kids can’t maximize their skills.”

• *Contact Marissa Nall at mnall@pacbiztimes.com.*

 [Share](#)  [Print](#)  [Email](#)

← PREVIOUS ARTICLE

[McChrystal talks technology, globalization at Westmont](#)

NEXT ARTICLE →

[Vandenberg Air Force Base strives to hire small businesses](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Marissa Nall

[View all articles by Marissa Nall »](#)