

HANOVER AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



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LEADERSHIP AWARDS

CHIPPERS

2016 SMALL BUSINESS INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

Growing Chippers: Core Values, Innovation and Teamwork



MUNDY WILSON PIPER

By the mid-1980s, land use patterns were changing in Vermont, as farmers retired and second homeowners recognized the farms' natural beauty. Will Russell, Chippers founder, had an entrepreneurial vision and a relentless work ethic. He saw that the new owners would need help managing their field and forest landscapes, and Chippers was born in 1986. The growing team, with Jason Eaton coming on in 1996, held themselves accountable to clients and one another, planting the seeds for the company's culture. Hiring was focused on character, expertise, and work ethic. In 2000, Mundy Wilson came aboard as Business Manager.

After Cal Felicetti's company Treescapes, merged with Chippers, Mundy took the lead developing marketing, systems and processes. In 2004, the partnership between Mundy and Will grew into marriage. In 2005, Mundy initiated goal-setting and strategic planning. Chippers saw double-digit sales growth, Theron Peck came on to run Turf Care, and in 2007 John Keefe came on as HR Manager. That year, Mundy led the successful effort to become accredited by the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA). Mundy is currently the third woman in the history of TCIA to sit on its Board of Directors.

In 2009 the recession hit hard; the next year brought an even more brutal blow. Will was diagnosed with cancer and died seven weeks later. He left the company and CEO position to Mundy because, "she always puts everyone else first." After absorbing the shock, her first action was to promise that she would not sell or leave for at least five years. The team rallied around Mundy with a deeply-felt understanding that standing together would keep the Chippers family strong.

Focused on problem-solving and continuous improvement, Mundy, through a peer leadership group called Vistage International, introduced EQ (Emotional Intelligence Quotient) to the team. EQ training paid off, enabling people to improve their management skills. The Garden division began in 2011, adding a new service for clients. It's a challenge to retain key crew members through the slow season, so the Maple division was formed in 2012 to provide winter work, and a tap lease program with landowners was implemented. Finished syrup is sold in the wholesale market to protect local producers.

Improving employee engagement was next. Mundy studied and implemented ways to bring the work closer to each employee. For example, crew leaders were coached to encourage more participation in meetings with their crews and it has paid dividends in safety and productivity. A peer-nominating program called "Kudos" recognizes outstanding performance. Annual goals are set with company-wide input and progress is shared throughout the year. Chippers provides opportunities for employees to train and earn certifications to advance their skills and careers.

Chippers has grown by hiring for diverse skills and shared values, and aligning everyone's activities around core values. In 2014 Mundy made explicit the values guiding the company from the beginning: Accountability, communication, hard work, integrity, positive attitude, professionalism, excellence, safety and reliability are represented in the motto "Live a Chippers Life". Throughout her tenure at Chippers, Mundy has led by encouraging others to organize, plan, and execute by finding new and better ways to do so. She is guided by the principle concisely stated by Jack Welch: "Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others".