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## **Commitment to People Defines Ethics in Business Award Winner**

The Maids Home Services earned the 2005 Ethics in Business Award sponsored by the St. Edward's University Center for Ethics and Leadership and the Samaritan Counseling Center. The company also achieved the 2003 Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce Customer Service Award in the small business category.

"The Ethics in Business Award is a very rewarding and exciting achievement," said John Gibbs, who with his wife Elaine operates the 55-employee Austin franchise cleaning service. A little more than a decade ago, the retired Air Force pilot and his wife Elaine began looking for their second career.

"We wanted a business where we would be working with people, helping their lives and offering a good product," Gibbs said. After visiting with several possible franchise opportunities, they chose The Maids because "they didn't try to tell us how rich we could get, but showed us an open and honest company."

"As part of their decision process, interviewers looked at how well we treat our people," Gibbs said. "We pay above the standard wage and all our staff worked their way up from the field. We give them a ladder to climb."

The Maids' employee assistance program includes chaplains who speak Spanish and visit employees in the hospital or their homes as necessary.

From an environmental viewpoint, The Maids uses only biodegradable cleaning supplies with no alcohol or chlorine unless necessary on an initial cleaning to take care of mold. "Sometimes customers want that chlorine smell to feel the house is clean, and we'll use their supplies if they insist, but we try to educate them why that's not necessarily healthy," Gibbs said.

The Maids travels four to a vehicle to save gasoline and reduce emissions, and use state-of-the art vacuums to trap allergens.

When it comes to customer satisfaction, The Maids has a policy that "the tie always goes to the customer," Gibbs said. After three cleanings, staff checks with the customer and the home to be certain the work is done well and to be certain the customer is not being overcharged. If it's determined the work necessary work is less than originally estimated, customers receive a rebate.

As part of the Ethics in Business Award competition process, staff, customers and vendors were interviewed for their opinions about The Maids.

"We have a reputation of honesty that we take very seriously. Elaine and I believe we have to walk the talk to set the example and our expectations for our employees."

The two other finalists in the Business Category are Freescale Semiconductor and the Austin office of Fleischman Hillard International Communications.

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