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**Abstract**

A report on the winners of the Prime Minister's Employer of the Year Awards. These prestigious awards are made to employers and businesses which demonstrate a commitment to employing people with disabilities. Excerpts from the speeches made at the ceremony highlight the benefits to all concerned i.e. employers and employees of open employment schemes. **Keyword: Employment**



## AUSTRALIA'S 'EMPLOYERS OF THE YEAR' ANNOUNCED

A small Queensland gemstone and tourist park and the giant Sizzler Restaurant chain were named today as the 1993 national winners of the prestigious Prime Minister's Employer of the Year Awards.

The awards are made to companies who demonstrate a strong commitment to employing people with a disability in the open labour market, providing them with the opportunity to prove themselves as valuable and productive members of the workforce.

The Mt Hay Tourist and Gemstone Park, a Rockhampton based exporter of rocks, minerals and fine pewter statues, took out the small business category.

Of its total staff of 14, Mt Hay employs six people with either an intellectual or physical disability. All are paid award wages, are fully integrated within the workplace and undertake a wide range of duties.

Sizzler Restaurant (New South Wales) won the large business category for its efforts to break down the barriers which people with a disability face in gaining access to productive and worthwhile work. Twelve people with disabilities ranging from hearing impairment to acquired brain injury are part of the Sizzler team in New South Wales.

The Sizzler chain has also made a national commitment to employing 200 people with a disability in its restaurants across Australia over the next 18 months.

Speaking at the Awards ceremony, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Housing, Local Government and Community Services, Brian Howe, said that the number and quality of this year's nominations proves that more and more businesses are beginning to look at peoples' abilities rather than their disabilities and are reaping the many rewards of doing so.

"They need workers who are dedicated and can contribute significantly to productivity - people with a disability are ready, willing and, most importantly, able to take up that challenge", he said.

"This year's winners are exceptional examples of forward-looking employers who are leading the way in developing a more flexible and responsive workforce."

Mr Howe said that during the past ten years, the Federal Government, the union movement, employers and people with a disability have joined forces to redefine what work means for people with a disability.

"Ten years ago, the debate about employment for people with a disability was defined by segregated models. In the 1990's, we have more ambitious goals driven by our vision for economic growth and social justice", he said.

"For many people with a disability who have experienced long periods of unemployment or under-employment, the opportunity to work in an environment of equality in which all employees get the same opportunities adds invaluable to a sense of independence".

Mr Howe said that with a package of Federal Government assistance to improve access to the labour market, people with a disability can and do work in open employment and participate in mainstream vocational education and training.

"The Commonwealth has long recognised the pool of talent, enthusiasm and ability that has lain wasted at the end of the unemployment queue and in some cases in sheltered workshops".

"This has changed the lives of many people from long-term dependency to active participation in the community and the full expression of the rights of citizenship".

The Employer of the Year Awards were presented by the Deputy Prime Minister representing the Prime Minister at a major function in Canberra today.

The ceremony also involved ACTU President, Martin Ferguson, Chief Executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ian Spicer, Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Hastings, and more than 300 representatives of the business sector.

A special message from the Prime Minister is attached and a list of State/Territory and national winners.

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