

## The 2010 Baden-Württemberg Competence Prize for Innovation and Quality Outstanding – not just in the south of the country

The 2010 Baden-Württemberg Competence Prize was presented at the "Control" trade fair to Klaus Fischer, owner/manager of the Fischer group of companies from Waldachtal and to the Igersheim-based machine maker Wittenstein alpha. Now in its third year, the prize comes under the patronage of Steinbeis and is an initiative of the Ulm-based Steinbeis enterprise TQU Group and trade fair organizer P.E. Schall. It recognizes the achievements of companies in reconciling the challenges of innovation and quality, and then translating this professionally into practice – resulting in sustainable and measurable commercial success. This year, Mahr, a producer of production measurement technology also received a special award for business excellence.

At the ceremony, Professor Dr. Heinz Trasch, Chairman of the Steinbeis Foundation Board, explained that Klaus Fischer had been awarded the prize for "continual excellence in innovation and quality, in combination with exemplary social commitment." Especially in the latter area, the jury found his work outstanding not least for engendering an extraordinary company culture. The Fischer group of companies has been the epitome of innovation, quality and service for more than 60 years, with Klaus Fischer at the helm for half of this time. Under his leadership, the medium-sized company has developed into a global business, with products sold in every corner of the globe. Fischer registers over 14 patents per 1000 employees a year, placing it second on the list of major patent registers in Germany. Klaus Fischer already received the Federal Cross of Merit in 2007 for his outstanding contribution to in-house and external training and employee development. Speaking at the ceremony, Fischer described the award as a "formidable honor, especially because it recognizes the link between innovation and quality, in combination with long-term, positive results." As well as describing this recognition as "personal praise," Fischer accepted "the award with delight, on behalf of all employees at the Fischer group of companies."

Explaining the decision, Helmut Bayer, jury member and director of TQU Business GmbH, said, "Expanding the Competence Prize categories to recognize individuals and their work with associations is a further signal of the need to acknowledge performance and



Prizewinner Klaus Fischer (fourth from left) with the Competence Prize jury

the acceptance the Baden-Württemberg Competence Prize has gained since its introduction three years ago." The jury's job was to pick a winner from a shortlist of ten. The original number of candidates was over 100. To gain an appreciation of how much Wittenstein alpha deserved its prize, the jury visited the company, which as well as presenting the example submitted in its application, portrayed the image of a genuine, exemplary company. The jury was particularly won over by its concerted efforts to improve products and processes through innovation activity, resulting in a significant reduction in warranty costs – which could be considered a benchmark for the entire sector.

The jury also judged the company Mahr worthy of an award for its digital calipers, a fur-

ther step in consolidating the market standing of the company. The jury was particularly impressed by the systematic approach taken by the company and its clearly organized product development processes. These take user requirements into account early in the process, reflecting these in the work and targets set in development, sales, marketing, production and financial accounts. Mahr received particular praise for its observance of the very highest standards and interaction with the production site in China, which is also an example to the sector.

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