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Tech Awards Honor Women

■ Industry Group Names 7 Winners

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By JOHN M. MORAN, Courant Staff Writer

Seven women in diverse fields ranging from physics to pharmaceuticals have been named winners of the annual Women of Innovation awards given by the Connecticut Technology Council.

The 2006 awards were scheduled to be presented late Thursday during ceremonies at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Cromwell.

The winners were identified as:

Christine Broadbridge, professor of physics at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven, for innovation and leadership in academics.

Rosemary Johnson-Hunter, president and chief executive of Connecticut Hospice in Branford, for innovation and leadership in the community.

Susan Froshauer, president and chief executive of Rib-X Pharmaceuticals Inc. in New Haven, for entrepreneurial innovation and leadership.

Karen Houseknecht, associate research fellow for Pfizer Inc. in New London, for innovation and leadership at a large business.

Nancy Hutson, senior vice president of Pfizer Inc. in New London, for innovation and leadership in research.

Jana Moak, chief executive at Control Module Inc. in Enfield, for innovation and leadership at a small business.

Bhaktapriya Nagalla, a student at Farmington High School, for youth innovation and leadership.

Winners were chosen by a panel of experts from a list of 45 finalists that was drawn from a field of 106 nominees.

Now in its second year, the Women of Innovation awards program aims to highlight the accomplishments of women in academia, research and development and technology-oriented business, according to Matthew Nemerson, president of the technology council, an industry group that created the awards.

"It's very, very important that we offer encouragement and let the word out that this is a state that recognizes that kind of achievement and supports it," he said.

Women are an increasingly important resource for technology businesses and other institutions looking to fill key jobs at both the managerial and entry levels, Nemerson said.

"When you look at the demographics of who are going to college and who is doing well in college, it's women. But they're not going into the sciences," he said.

Elaine Pullen, chief technology officer at Gerber Scientific Inc. in South Windsor and the keynote speaker for the Women of Innovation awards event, said qualified women will be needed to help fill an anticipated raft of vacancies in technical positions in the coming years as baby boomers reach retirement age.

"We need to attract more young girls into science and engineering fields," she said.

The honorees from the Women of Innovation awards can serve as mentors and role models, helping convince more women that such careers are accessible and rewarding, Pullen said.

The awards are "really a celebration of women in all different fields who are successful because they're innovative and bright," said Pullen, who also serves as chairman of Connecticut Innovations, the state's venture capital arm, and is a former chairwoman of the technology council.