

## Universal saluted for patriotism

By Chris Welch  
Union staff writer

**WHITEWATER** — Whitewater-based Universal Electronics on Thursday was given a special salute by a national organization for its support of employees who serve in military reserves.

The Patriot Award and "Statement of Support" Recognition are presented by Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a U.S. Department of Defense organization. It is a staff group within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs (OASD/RA), which is in itself a part of the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

The ESGR was established in 1972 to promote cooperation and understanding between Reserve component members and their civilian employers and to assist in the resolution of conflicts arising from an employee's military commitment.

Companies are nominated for the Patriot Award by employees at the companies who are reservists. Universal Electronics was nominated by seven-year employee Roy Nelson, who lives in Johnson Creek.

Nelson served six years in the Navy and another six years in the Navy Reserves. He is expecting to be deployed overseas in early 2009. Shown above are Universal Electronics employees at the program. At left are, left to right: Retired Col. Mike Williams, Universal Electronics CEO Rick Johnson and Nelson with the plaques. Below left, Williams addresses attendees. Below right, Williams presents the plaques to Johnson. A related story appears on page 1. — Daily Union photos by Chris Welch.

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"They bend over backwards for me anytime I have any military obligation," Nelson said of Universal Electronics prior to the ceremony. "A lot of time, there is very short notice. I now have a lot of extra training for my next deployment, and whenever I have to go, they say, 'We will see you when you come back, and thanks for everything.' So I nominated them for this award."

This will be Nelson's first deployment in the current war. "I was serving there earlier in the 1980s and early 1990s," he said. "I am not sure where I am headed yet, but I am leaving in February. The unit I am with now is a maritime civil affairs unit. What we actually do in the field depends on where we will be located."

The awards themselves were handed out during a special luncheon ceremony in which all employees were able to attend and was hosted by CEO Rick Johnson.

Presenting the awards was retired U.S. Army Col. Mike Williams, who is the parks and recreation director for Janesville, and volunteer for ESGR.

"Our primary mission is to get out into communities and communicate with employers that employ members of the Guard and Reserve," he explained. "In today's global situation, employers make a lot of sacrifices when they hire members of the Guard and Reserve. There is a likelihood that they will need to be deployed, and that creates challenges and sacrifices on the employer and many employees that work in that environment when they lose a soldier, sailor, airman or marine that has to be activated."

"We say it is a great thing to hire, and continue to employ them," Williams said. "It is a great patriotic mission. We have awards for employers of Guard and Reserve members who go above and beyond, those that demonstrate a tremendous amount of support for not only individuals, but also represent support to our national defense."

The award is "called the Patriot Award for obvious reasons," he

said as he handed the plaque to Johnson. "We want to recognize the patriotic duty of Rick Johnson."

In addition, Williams also presented Johnson, on behalf of the entire Universal Electronics workforce, a second plaque called "A Statement of Support."

"This Statement of Support simply validates everything that Rick is already doing to support the Guard and Reserves," Williams explained.

Speaking after the awards were presented, Johnson noted that his wife had injured her back last Friday and he knew he "would have to be a good dad to get up early and help get our young children ready in the morning."

"I woke them up, but they did not want to get up," he continued. "I picked out the wrong clothes. I did make the right food. They made enough noise to wake our 20-month-old and I had to change her diaper. I started to think that if I was in the Reserves, I could be leaving all of this behind right now."

"That is funny for a few seconds, until you start to think about it," Johnson continued. "The people in our military and Reserves really do leave all this behind. They leave everything they love behind; their spouses, their kids, their friends. Everything they love. They do not leave for a few days or weeks. They are gone for months on end. The sacrifice of employers is nothing to the sacrifice that the members of the military make to protect us."

"I want Roy to know that Universal Electronics will be here for him," Johnson said. "When he comes back safe and sound, we will be here for him."

After the ceremony, Johnson discussed what the award meant to him as company CEO.

"I did not expect this much at all, and it is really a surprise for me," he said. "What is more of a surprise is that the things that we do for the reservist that we have here — I assumed everybody who owns a company did that. To me, it is a small show of appreciation for what we can do as a company for those who are in the reserves. It is not burden to us. It is not a sacrifice to us. It is something that we are very proud to be able to do."



**PATRIOT AWARD** — Universal Electronics in Whitewater on Thursday was recognized by the Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) for its support of employees who serve in military Reserves. The Patriot Award and "Statement of Support" Recognition are presented by the ESGR, a U.S. Department of Defense organization. Companies are nominated for the Patriot Award by employees who are Reservists. Universal Electronics was nominated by seven-year employee Roy Nelson, who lives in Johnson Creek. Nelson served six years in the Navy and another six years in the Navy Reserves. He is expecting to be deployed overseas in early 2009. Shown above are Universal Electronics employees at the program. At left are, left to right: Retired Col. Mike Williams, Universal Electronics CEO Rick Johnson and Nelson with the plaques. Below left, Williams addresses attendees. Below right, Williams presents the plaques to Johnson. A related story appears on page 1. — Daily Union photos by Chris Welch.

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