



Ron Shaich, Panera, accepts MUFSSO 2011 Pioneer Award

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MUFSSO 2011 industry Pioneer award winner Ron Shaich is no shrinking violet when it comes to sharing his thoughts about the company he co-founded and remains the executive chairman of — 1,493-unit Panera Bread Co. — or restaurant industry issues in general.

During acceptance remarks Monday night at NRN's Industry Celebration & Awards Recognition event, Shaich noted some of his industry heroes who had previously won the award, including Carl Karcher of Carl's Jr., Dave Thomas of Wendy's, and Norm Brinker of Steak and Ale and Chili's. He confided later that, as he recalled, some of the honorees were 70 or 80 years old when they were recognized, that some had passed away not long after being celebrated, and that, in some cases, their organizations later lost their luster.



"I'm here to tell you that for this 'pioneer,' at least, my best work is still ahead of me," Shaich quipped amidst audience laughter.

He also noted that a segment of a video profile about him played during the event that included some scenes of his children "was of particular interest" to him. He indirectly referred to his career and business and philanthropic philosophies and added, "So much a part of what this is about is about doing things that they ultimately will see and respect."

"In that short piece you credited me with helping to create the bakery-cafe category and, indeed, fast-casual. But the truth is, all I've done is to try to listen and learn and to try to build a hypothesis of what will make a difference in the lives of guests over the long term," Shaich said.

"I'd now like to thank those people — those manufacturers, those franchisees, those team members of mine and our friends — who believed in Au Bon Pain first, and then Panera, when nobody believed that anyone was interested in anything other than fast food and fine dining.

"The message that is central to my work and is the hidden message behind this award tonight: Folks, customers are willing to pay. They are willing to pay for food they respect, they are

willing to pay for food in environments that engage them, and people are willing to pay for food they feel respects them," Shaich said.

After his speech, NRN publisher Randall Friedman joked that Shaich, "clearly needs to develop a little passion," for his work.