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Local baking company wins national award from 7-Eleven

As Reported by JANETTE RODRIGUES with THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT • Reach Janette Rodrigues at (757) 222-5208 or janette.rodrigues@pilotonline.com.

CHESAPEAKE — Jeff Saunders didn't really believe his little baking company had a shot at the national award.

The list of past winners reads like a "Who's Who" of food and beverage manufacturing: Anheuser-Busch Cos., Hershey Co. and Pinnacle Foods Corp., which makes Swanson, Duncan Hines and Aunt Jemima products.

But last week, BakeFresh Co. was named one of 7-Eleven's 2006 Retailer Initiative Award winners.

The Chesapeake-based company provides doughnuts, brownies and other baked goods to 7-Eleven stores from New England to North Carolina.

"We were told that as a smaller company, we probably didn't have a great shot to win the overall award," said Saunders, the company's president and chief executive officer. "So when they called us, it was wonderful and truly humbled us."

BakeFresh employs 170 workers at plants in Chesapeake – in a Greenbrier business park off Military Highway – and in Westerley, R.I. Both plants produce the baked goods and have research and development departments on site.

The convenience-store giant said the Chesapeake company was chosen for its innovation, production efficiency and execution, and quality assurance standards for food safety.

Saunders' Rhode Island plant also supplies cheesecakes to Trader Joe's grocery stores, A&P Supermarket and Wakefern Food Corp. He is in talks with a big-box discount retailer to carry a product he calls cheesecake batter-in-a-bucket, already available at A&P.

BakeFresh shares this year's award with UST Inc., the maker of Copenhagen and Skoal chewing tobacco.

Saunders, 42, of Virginia Beach, is tickled about who his company beat to get the award: "They said that Miller Brewing Co. took an honorable mention behind us."