

# Niagara entrepreneur winners announced

By ALISON LANGLEY / QMI Agency

Recipients of the 17th annual Niagara Entrepreneur of the Year Awards were announced Friday at a gala event at the Sheraton Fallsview Hotel and Conference Centre.

"This year's recipients are representative of the innovation, ingenuity and talent that we have in the Niagara Region," said Doug Frazer, chairman of the Niagara Entrepreneur of the Year Awards.

"It is important that we recognize and applaud their successes in business since their entrepreneurial spirit has significantly contributed to Niagara's economic development."

The awards were established in 1994 to recognize the achievements, excellence and innovation of Niagara's entrepreneurs.

The program has recognized 686 entrepreneurs from the Niagara region.

About 500 people attended the event which recognized more than 35 businesses and individuals.

The recipients of the 2010 Niagara Entrepreneur of the Year Awards are as follows:

Emerging Entrepreneur Award:

Deriving photo letter art from the creative process of photographing objects and scenery that resemble letters of the English alphabet, Jennifer Blakely is the visionary behind Alphabet Photography. Before selling her unique product to customers, Jennifer created frames for family and friends as gifts who later suggested she should venture into business. Since 2006 Jennifer has seen tremendous success and growth in sales. Her photo art has been featured on Breakfast Television, CityLine and Stephen and Chris as well as in Chatelaine Magazine, the Toronto Star and countless more. She has also secured partnerships and distributors through major retail outlets including: Target, HomeSense, Home Outfitters and Walmart.

Family Enterprise Award:

Stephen Parker, Flexo Products Limited of Niagara Falls.

Flexo's business roots date back to 1918 when Stephen Parker's great grandfather started Flexo Cotton Products. In 1988, Stephen bought Flexo from his father Earl Parker to form Flexo Products Limited.

A family run business that has survived generations, Flexo has successfully adapted to industry changes, while growing in profits and employees.

Stephen has developed Flexo Products Limited into one of Canada's most complete sanitary supply companies through the manufacturing and distribution of industrial and commercial cleaning chemicals, cleaning equipment, paper products and supplies. Their continuous research and development has resulted in a long history of producing innovative "green" products.

Established Enterprise Award:

Shawn Barlow, Photech Environmental Solutions Inc.

Beginning operations in St. Catharines in 1997, Barlow has grown Photech Environmental from a two-man operation that was originally intended to service the hazardous wastes generated by dental offices to an

industrial and household hazardous waste management company that offers complete environmental waste management services, including recycling, waste transport and disposal.

**Innovative Small Business Award:**

Operating since 2002, Distinctive Designs & Cabinetry Inc. in St. Catharines is a full service cabinetry company. Anne Lennard-Otto has combined her designs with incite to help clients consider projects in its entirety. She works directly with clients to see their projects through, creating designs that are effective, functional and unique. She has expanded her business and carved out a niche in the industry by working with contractors in the building and development of sub divisions.

**International Trade Award:**

Koppers Fishing and Tackle Corp., of Niagara-on-the-Lake, was launched in 2006 from a wood carving hobby and has grown into an international success. Grant Koppers' success has grown rapidly as did his realization that there was a need and potential for the creation of a better crankbait, resulting in the conception of his Livetarget brand of fishing lures.

**Technological Innovation Award:**

After 20 years of teaching, Geoff Irvine, of St. Catharines, decided to leave behind his teaching career to work on concepts and technologies that would aid in the learning process. In 2000, he established Chalk & Wire Learning Assessment Inc., which provides web-based tools that collect data about learning and learners.

**Tourism Enterprise Award:**

Since the curtain's opened for its first performance in 2006, Lyndesfarne Theatre Projects in St. Catharines has become a catalyst in connecting its community through theatre arts, live theatre education and outreach programming for St. Catharines and the Niagara Region. Kelly Daniels' vision of Lyndesfarne is one which has community at the heart of its programming and has been developed out of her belief that the arts will become an essential and integral part of the cultural and artistic landscape of the Niagara Region.

For the past four years, Lyndesfarne's live theatre has been making an impression not just on audiences in the Niagara Region, but also abroad, welcoming audience members from Guelph, Milton, Stratford, Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Michigan as well as various locales in New York.

Gene Luczkiw Spirit of Enterprise Awards, which provide financial support to students who demonstrate the spirit of enterprise:

As a grade 12 student at Saint Michael Catholic High School, Aaron Bailey personifies what it means to have the enterprising spirit. Through his involvement as co-chair with the Niagara Falls Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee (MYAC), Aaron has volunteered over 800 hours advising city council on the needs of the city's youth and seeking to improve the local community's infrastructure such as the environmental cleanliness of Niagara for residents. His involvement with MYAC has also provided him with the opportunity to create Upload, a page in the Niagara Falls Review, written and maintained by students, allowing them to express their opinions. Aaron's involvement and dedication to his school and community, along with academic success, demonstrate this enterprising spirit.

Cameron Dobbelstyn is a grade 12 student at Sir Winston Churchill. Cameron has demonstrated the enterprising spirit through his involvement with Scouts Canada, volunteering for a number of their initiatives, resulting in being awarded the prestigious Governor General of Canada's Chief Scouts Award. He has also volunteered with the Niagara Literacy Event, Football Niagara, and World Vision. This year he was selected as a Prefect for Sir Winston Churchill, choosing to be a "leader and ambassador" for the school, welcoming new students and raising awareness for issues, such as bullying. Cameron is very dedicated and focused on both his academics and community, proving to be a valuable individual to his peers.

Gaelle Groux's enterprising spirit emerged when she began researching the genocide in Darfur as part of her involvement with the Model UN. After joining a local Amnesty International Group she began her own Amnesty Club called the Teens for Change Club at Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School, where she is a grade 12 student. Through this initiative the club has raised over \$4,000 for a variety of organizations that highlight issues ranging from education in third world countries to sexual abuse in Niagara. Gaelle is also an environmentalist, leading Sir Winston Churchill's Eco Club in addition to joining the Niagara Falls Nature Club and volunteering for the NPCA Water Festival. Gaelle's personal values and standards make her approach every task with honour and integrity, leading her peers by her example.

#### Niagara Original:

In 1996, Scott Riesebosch developed the Child Reminder System for the school bus industry, an ingenious solution incorporating LED technology to keep children safe and reduce bussing company risk. Mr. Riesebosch incorporated CRS Electronics in 1998 and since then, the Company has branched out into LED lighting design and manufacturing to serve many customers in a variety of industries. Today, CRS has become the 'best-in-class' LED lighting solution provider with cost effective, safe and durable solutions for their clients' lighting needs. CRS is continually expanding its product range with industry leading design and engineering. CRS products are lead-free, mercury-free, arsenic-free and are recyclable.

#### Historical Hall of Fame Award: M.K. Rittenhouse (1884-1980)

Born in Vineland, Moses Kensley Rittenhouse continued his family's legacy in the area as the great great grandson of one of the first settlers in Twenty Valley and the son of a farmer and Mennonite minister.

Moving to Jordan Station, Moses' entrepreneurial spirit emerged, establishing M.K. Rittenhouse in 1914 after seeing a need for agricultural spraying equipment in the booming tender fruit region in Niagara. Despite fluctuations in the agricultural industry, Moses' persistence and ingenuity allowed his business to grow and see the first of many patents for spraying machines. Beyond his business, Moses made lasting contributions to his community and was instrumental in the establishment of Jordan Museum of the Twenty. Moses has left a lasting legacy as M.K. Rittenhouse remains in operation and continues to grow.

#### Community Contribution Award:

Community involvement is extremely important to Sandra Murre, incorporating it in every aspect of her life, including her business. Currently Sandra sits on the Niagara West YMCA's board and is a part of their Capital Campaign. Other current causes that Sandra is involved with include New Hope Church Niagara, the Niagara Community Foundation and Engineers without Borders, which brought her to Zambia last year. Sandra is the Founder and CEO of Jordan Engineering and has built her company around giving back, with the "Spirit of Generosity" included in their core values. Sandra not only contributes her time but also donates one third of her company's profits to the organizations she is affiliated with. For Sandra, volunteering is a rewarding experience because she is always learning from the people and organizations she's involved with. It is for this reason that Sandra's company also created and abides by the core value, "Empowerment integrated with Accountability", particularly when selecting organizations to partner with.

#### Lifetime Achievement Hall of Fame Award:

As president of Rankin Construction, Tom Rankin has made significant contributions to the development of the Niagara Region's infrastructure over the past 32 years. In addition to constructing bridges, roads and waterways, Tom has expanded his business to include handling radioactive waste and the building of renewable energy projects. Founded in 1978 by Tom Rankin and Dave Stephens under the original name Stephens and Rankin Construction, the company was renamed in 1991 as Rankin Construction after Stephens sold his shares. Tom's entrepreneurial spirit has allowed him to expand in his field and move his company in new directions by focusing on renewable energy projects. He exemplifies how combining vision, innovation and technology can not only grow a company, but a community.