

February 22, 2006

Annual Alberta Business Awards of Distinction announced



CALGARY – Excellence in Alberta's business community was honoured as winners of Alberta Business Awards of Distinction were handed out tonight. The awards, announced at a gala banquet in Calgary, were presented to businesses that exemplify business achievement.

Winners are as follows:

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission Diversity Leadership Award of Distinction

- Bear Slashing, Bonnyville
- Canterra Suites Hotel, Edmonton

Alberta Human Resources and Employment Employer of People with Disabilities Award of Distinction

- Starbucks, Calgary

Alberta Human Resources and Employment Employer of Youth Award of Distinction

- Kids In The Hall Bistro, Edmonton

Business Development Bank of Canada Small Business Award of Distinction

- XSENSOR Technology Corporation, Calgary

Certified Management Accountants of Alberta/Alberta Chambers of Commerce Ethics in Business Award of Distinction

- Chevron Canada Resources, Calgary

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada/Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative Aboriginal Relations - Best Practice Award of Distinction

- Syncrude Canada, Fort McMurray

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Eagle Feather Business Award of Distinction

- Goodfish Lake Development Corporation, Goodfish Lake

Syncrude Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneur Award of Distinction

- Cree Convenience & Peace Hills Pure Water, Hobbema

University of Alberta/TELUS Partners in Workplace Learning Award of Distinction

- Syncrude Canada, Fort McMurray

Western Economic Diversification Canada's Export Award of Distinction

- Alberta Oil Tool, Edmonton

WCB - Alberta WorkSafe™ Safety Leader Award of Distinction

- NAL Resources, Calgary

WCB - Alberta WorkSafe™ Safety Turnaround Award of Distinction

- Vetco Gray, Edmonton

Zoom Communications /Jet Stream Digital Media Marketing Award of Distinction

- Heritage Community Foundation, Edmonton

Alberta Economic Development Premier's Award of Distinction*

- Upside Software Inc., Edmonton

*All finalists from each category were automatically eligible and considered for this award.

"We are very pleased with the excellent representation from fourteen Alberta communities. This year's nominees show that Alberta businesses are extremely successful throughout our great province," said Darrell Toma, President of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce.

The awards are hosted by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce in association with numerous corporate sponsors. "We are very excited to partner with the key leading business organizations that make these awards possible," said Toma.

Major sponsors include: Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative, Alberta Economic Development, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, Business Development Bank of Canada, Certified Management Accountants of Alberta, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, University of Alberta, TELUS, Western Economic Diversification Canada, Workers' Compensation Board - Alberta, Zoom Communications/Jet Stream Digital Media, Syncrude Canada, and the Alberta Chambers of Commerce along with the Edmonton Sun and Calgary Sun. Support is also provided by Apex Audio Visual Services and Catalyst Theatre.

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NOTE: A backgrounder profiling the winning companies is attached.

For further information, please contact:

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Recipients

2006 Alberta Business Awards of Distinction

Diversity Leadership Award of Distinction Small to Medium Sized Employer

Awarded to an organization that embraces diversity in its workforce, encourages respect and inclusion, eliminates discrimination and barriers, and helps create welcoming and inclusive workplaces and communities.

Bear Slashing Ltd., Bonnyville, 40-100 employees (seasonal)

Danny Dion, President

Bear Slashing — one of the largest mulching companies in Canada — is a labour of love for the man who started the company. Danny Dion's philosophy has always been, "stay positive, have goals, work hard and be rewarded." Judging from the number of seasonal employees who return year after year, that is a sound philosophy. The company welcomes workers from all across Canada, many facing their own challenges such as literacy, language or race. The eclectic group that comes together each year is brought on with the expectation, not of perfection, but of effort. Bear Slashing's recruitment practices involve actively recruiting workers from across Canada and incorporates a First Nations policy that states, whenever possible, the company will employ a minimum of 30 per cent of its workers from the Aboriginal community. These practices combined with a drive to build understanding, tolerance and team, have all proved very successful for Bear Slashing.

Canterra Suites Executive Hotel, Edmonton, 13 employees

Murray Brown, Owner

The small staff employed at Canterra Suites is truly the epitome of a diverse workforce. The staff of 13 includes 10 women and 3 men from Canada, the Philippines, Portugal, Libya, Trinidad and Guyana. In addition one of the staff has autism, two are illiterate and the ages of the employees ranges from 28 to 63! In order to make such a diverse workforce click, Canterra Suites has worked since day one to build a culture of respect and cooperation. Management works with all staff to provide an understanding of cultures, languages and attitudes, and involves employees in activities at, and away from, work that brings the team together. These efforts are paying off. In 2003, the Psychologists' Association of Alberta presented Canterra with the 2003 Healthy Workplace Initiative Award, and since 2002, the company has been nominated 141 times for the Edmonton Tourism "You're Welcome Awards" — an average of 13 nominations per employee!

Alberta Human Resources and Employment – Employer of Persons with Disabilities Award of Distinction

Awarded to a business demonstrating creative leading edge practices in hiring, training, and developing employees with disabilities.

Starbucks Coffee Canada, Calgary Locations, 3,400 employees

Colin Moore, President

Starbucks Calgary partners with Prospect Services in an initiative to increase diversity in the workplace. There are now 15 Calgary Starbucks locations competitively employing individuals with disabilities. To accommodate the unique needs of some employees, job profiles have been modified along with corporate forms such as performance appraisals. The modifications allow Starbucks to take into account the needs and requirements of the employee. The company actively works with all staff to welcome persons with disabilities to the Starbucks team and feels that these employees have added a new dimension to the company. Many of the disabled persons hired by Starbucks are also aspiring artists and to help them grow their skills, space has been used to exhibit paintings created by these employees in many of the locations.

Employer of Youth Award of Distinction

Awarded to an organization that has demonstrated outstanding achievement in hiring youth and providing them with career oriented-opportunities.

Kids in the Hall Bistro Program, Edmonton, 60 employees (approximately)

Calvin Avery, Program Manager

For nearly a decade, the Kids in the Hall Bistro Program has operated a successful program for at-risk youth, which integrates life skills, career development workshops and educational options with on the job work experience. The program operates a public restaurant at Edmonton's City Hall. As well Kids in the Hall Bistro Program operates a training/workshop site that offers youth a non-judgemental learning environment where they are able to work through issues such as risk of homelessness, personal and family problems, addiction issues and employment or school related areas that may be barriers to their success. Since the programs inception, many youth have "graduated" to pursue career options and further education. In June of 2005, their most famous customer to date visited Kids in the Hall Bistro — Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

Business Development Bank of Canada Small Business Award of Distinction

Awarded to the small business owner who best reflects the outstanding spirit and success of the province's small business community.

XSENSOR Technology Corporation, Calgary, 28 employees

Ian Main, President and Chief Technology Officer

XSENSOR Technology Corporate designs, manufactures and sells the most advanced pressure imaging systems for use in medical, industrial and point-of-sale environments. XSENSOR was founded on leading-edge thinking. Its solid foundation has enabled the company to transition successfully from the Age of Information to the Age of Imagination. Clients trust XSENSOR's work because it is grounded in well-researched and repeatedly enhanced information. The company is an internationally recognized leader with clients in over 30 countries and since 2002, XSENSOR has posted 100 per cent gains year-over-year. Profits generated by this amazing growth have been poured back into the company allowing XSENSOR to operate debt-free and plan for further growth.

CMA/ACC Ethics in Business Award of Distinction

Awarded to an organization that, in the course of their day-to-day activities, exemplifies clear and open communication about corporate ethics, and a commitment to uncompromising ethical behaviour while exceeding customer/stakeholder expectations in the services they provide.

Chevron Canada Resources, Calgary, 206 employees

Alex Archilla, President

An ethical approach is embedded in every aspect of Chevron Canada Resources. The company's value statement is framed by an overarching consideration for conducting business in a socially responsible and ethical manner that respects the law, supports universal human rights, protects the environment and benefits the communities in which the company works. As a wholly owned subsidiary of Chevron Corporation, the company embraces its parent company's vision and values statement, "The Chevron Way." Its intent is to establish a common understanding, not only for employees, but for others who interact with the company as well. There are three elements to "The Chevron Way." First, it sets the company's vision, which sends the signal that the company wishes to be admired by its stakeholders not only for the goals they achieve, but also for how they achieve them. Second, "The Chevron Way" articulates the company's values, which include integrity, trust, diversity, ingenuity, partnership, protecting people and the environment, and high performance. Finally, the third element of "The Chevron Way" refers to the company's corporate strategy, which translates its vision — including the values it embodies — into action. In addition to "The Chevron Way" the company has set out standards for how it acts and conducts itself in "The Chevron Business Conduct and Ethics Code." This code describes the responsibilities and accountabilities regarding the company's accounting and internal controls.

INAC/AWPI Aboriginal Relations – Best Practice Award of Distinction

Awarded to a non-Aboriginal business that demonstrates outstanding achievements in Aboriginal relations, including economic development, employment and training, and Aboriginal community support.

Syncrude Canada Ltd., Fort McMurray, 4,200 employees

Charles Ruigrok, CEO

Syncrude is the world's largest producer of crude oil from oil sands and Canada's largest single source of crude oil. Syncrude has a long history of involvement in and commitment to the Aboriginal community, which has resulted in it being recognized as a leader in Aboriginal relations. Nearly 1,000 Aboriginals are employed directly by Syncrude or indirectly by its contractors. Over the years, Syncrude's Aboriginal Development Program has evolved to reflect changes in the times and the region. The company's Aboriginal Development Program consists of six key commitment areas: corporate leadership, employment, business development, education and training, community development, and the environment. By focusing on these areas Syncrude is helping to build a stronger community that prospers, while remaining true to itself.

Eagle Feather Business Award of Distinction

Awarded to a First Nation's owned business that demonstrates outstanding achievement in business and has incorporated entrepreneurial and cultural concepts into its operation for long-term success.

Goodfish Lake Development Limited Partnership, Goodfish Lake, 100 employees

George Halfe, CEO

The Goodfish Lake Development Limited Partnership (GFLD) provides the sewing and manufacturing of personal protective equipment, coveralls and parkas, work wear and safe wear for the oil and gas industry. In addition, the company provides laundry and dry-cleaning of uniforms, coveralls and linen, uniform rental and commercial laundry services to catering camps throughout Northern Alberta. Though the company is modest about the success of its cleaning operations, it is one of the largest volume dry-cleaners in Canada. The GFLD employs 100 people and approximately 90 per cent of its employees are from the Whitefish Lake Band #128. GFLD is growing at a very consistent rate and is working on improving the lives of its shareholders by providing an intrinsic return on shareholder value.

Syncrude Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneur Award of Distinction

This new award recognizes outstanding achievement by young Aboriginal entrepreneurs. The award is given to the business that best exemplifies the qualities of effective leadership, innovatively applied know-how, and excellent potential for growth; that shows a high level of social, cultural, and environmental awareness and a demonstrated commitment to the wider Aboriginal community; and that engages in continuous learning or other improvement opportunities designed to advance the economic, social, and environmental prospects of the enterprise.

Cree Convenience and Peace Hills Pure Water, Hobbema, 5 employees

Derek Bruno and Cody Bruno, Owner Operators

Cree Convenience was initially established because the co-owners thought they could achieve two things. They wanted to supplement their university incomes and they felt there was a need determined for a convenience store operation that offered an increased level of service. They were right. In their first year of operations, Cree Convenience reached \$1.2 million in revenue beating their third-year predictions! Next came Peace Hills Pure Water as a way to address poor water conditions on the reservation. Started first through a partnership with a Reverse Osmosis water company out of Camrose, the company is at the point of building their own water system in Wetaskiwin to meet demand. Co-owner Derek Bruno holds a First Nations Management Diploma and is in the last year of his Bachelor of Commerce Degree. He is the youngest Chairman of the Board ever of the Samson Cree Nations Holding Company. Derek's brother Cody is also a strong entrepreneur in his own right and is also currently completing his commerce degree.

Learning in the Workplace Award of Distinction

Awarded to an employer committed to and successfully implementing learning or training opportunities for their employees in the workplace, by working with a provincial post-secondary institution.

Syncrude Canada Ltd., Fort McMurray, 4,300 employees

Charles Ruigrok, CEO

Syncrude is renowned for its investment in workplace learning and skills upgrading. In 2004, the company invested 3.1 per cent hours in formal workforce training per employee — not including on-the-job training. Consistent with the company's vision and values statement, "encouraging learning and innovation in everything we do," Syncrude provides and supports training opportunities to meet specific job-related objectives to increase employees' competence that are in line with their career aspirations, and to increase their potential for future opportunities. Syncrude's commitment to workplace learning is supported by a number of programs aimed at building organizational capacity, including: Succession Management, Training Shared Services, Technician Development, Leadership Development and more. Syncrude's success speaks to their ability to develop and leverage individual capabilities, and to their commitment to learning and innovation in everything they do.

Western Economic Diversification Canada's Export Award of Distinction

Awarded to the organization that has demonstrated outstanding achievement in exporting products or services outside of Canada's borders.

Alberta Oil Tool, Edmonton, 234 employees

Daryl Harrington, President

Alberta Oil Tool is a manufacturer of oilfield products with exports to 35 countries in 2005. In 2005, the total export sales for Alberta Oil Tool doubled the export sales recorded by the company in 2002. This success is the result of an export strategy that includes using an established distribution network, partnering with synergistic companies, partnering with Export Development Canada to allow the company to work in regions that carry a higher risk, striving to work hand in hand with clients in foreign countries and more. Among the countries Alberta Oil Tools products can be found in include Azerbaijan, Germany, India, Kazakhstan, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela. Future key markets targeted for development include Albania, Chad and Columbia.

WCB Safety Leader Award of Distinction

Awarded to an employer that leads its industry with an exemplary health, safety and disability management program and proven injury prevention track record.

NAL Resources, Calgary, 300 employees

Andrew Wiswell, President and CEO

NAL Resources is a safety leader in the oil and gas industry. The company's excellent safety management system is recognized industry-wide for high standards and professionalism. NAL Resources maintains an excellent injury prevention track record and is proud of the fact that since the company's inception 15 years ago, none of NAL's employees have been involved in a lost time accident. At NAL, safety is not contained to one department. Instead, safety is integrated into every aspect of their business. NAL has created a culture focused on safety by gaining company-wide support for the program's values and by continually improving processes based on feedback. Such is their dedication to safety that NAL's safety standards often exceed regulatory standards and industry recommended practices.

WCB Safety Turnaround Award of Distinction

Awarded to an employer that has dramatically turned around poor or average injury track records and created an exceptional health, safety and disability management program.

Vetco Gray Canada Inc., Edmonton, 145 employees

Abbey Raikles, General Manager

In Vetco Gray's own words prior to 2001 "a health and safety culture was non-existent" at the company. The belief was that injuries are normal and can be expected, given the nature of the business. This was reflected in lost time injury rates of 15.33, severity rates of 334.17 and recordable injury rates of 41.45. Things turned around in 2001 with the development of a formal safety management system and the creation of a safety department. Practices such as employee training, a disability management program, the inclusion of team safety representatives and hazard identification have all resulted in a dramatic turnaround for Vetco Gray. In October 2005, the company recorded zero lost time accident injuries, a zero severity rate for the past 12 months, and a recordable injury rate of just 3.28.

Marketing Award of Distinction

Awarded to the organization that has best developed and implemented a successful marketing strategy that has had a significant impact on the organization.

Heritage Community Foundation, Edmonton, 28 employees

Morris Flewwelling, President & Chair

The Heritage Community Foundation is a charitable organization that designs and develops historical, natural, cultural, scientific and technological heritage websites and online learning resources under the banner of AlbertaSource.ca. In order to promote their projects, the Heritage Community Foundation undertook a comprehensive multi-layered marketing program that included online and offline content. Print related promotions included lure cards and bookmarks distributed through schools, tradeshow and conferences, along with billboards, newsletters and more. To round out the print marketing strategies the Heritage Community Foundation employed, the organization also used online tactics, broadcast promotions and outreach promotions that included a speaker series and tradeshow and conference appearances. So far the marketing undertaken by the Heritage Community foundation has resulted in over 1.5 million visitors clicking onto their website.

Premier's Award of Distinction Award of Distinction

This prestigious award is presented to an Alberta firm that embodies the Alberta Advantage; exhibits overall outstanding achievement and leadership in Alberta; and demonstrates ongoing, consistent involvement in community events and organizations locally and/or provincially.

Upside Software Inc., Edmonton, 120 employees

Ashif Mawji, President and CEO

Upside Software is a leading developer of Contract Lifecycle Management software and related solutions for customers around the world. Fully 95 per cent of Upside's revenues are derived from exports to markets around the world including the major markets of the United States and Europe. In order to manage growth, Upside has developed their entry strategies to be as cost-effective as possible. Strategies utilized have included leveraging the power of the Internet to attract customers and developing partnerships with firms capable of selling Upside's products and services. These strategies have been employed with great success. Given how far Upside has come since founding in 2000, the future looks unlimited for this Alberta company!