

# TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

New Brunswick knowledge industry honours its best; KIRA awards handed out at annual ceremony

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With a focus on educating special-needs children, Fredericton's Virtual Expert Clinics Inc. (VEC) is not like most information technology companies.

The 10 full-time employees of VEC develop educational therapy technology with content written by therapists for special-needs children. Their current project, an artificially intelligent online therapy software program called AutismPro, is set for an October launch at the Geneva Centre for Autism in Toronto. The program is currently being prepared for a research study in anticipation of the launch.

"It basically represents a whole new way of delivering educational therapy online," said Cynthia Howroyd, the chief executive officer of VEC.

"It represents a much more technologically sophisticated approach to the problem than has been achieved before."

The company has a large market size, Ms. Howroyd said, comprised of millions of children around the world, and the online element of their product allows them access to that global market.

"We have a high market pain," she said. "People aren't getting access to the quality therapy they need for their child."

VEC's efforts led to a KIRA award for the company last night, earning them the title of the most promising information technology start-up.

The KIRAs - New Brunswick's IT sector awards - focus on companies that use IT to deliver product and services.

"It gives us all a boost and shows us that our community recognizes our efforts," said Ms. Howroyd of the morale-building recognition.

"It's like a mini-Juno Awards for New Brunswick in the knowledge industry."

VEC was nominated along with 47 other companies for the 2006 awards, the most in the eight-year history of the KIRAs.

It was officially announced at last night's ceremony that the winners of the awards for technological advancement/innovation in the private and public sectors (InteliSys Aviation Systems based in Shediac and the N.B. Policing Information Management/Information Technology Sharing Program, respectively), would receive an automatic nomination for the Canadian Information Productivity Awards in November.

"CIPA wants to be recognized as a national award in the same way that we want to be recognized as a provincial award," said Lori MacMullen, the awards ceremony co-chair.

Currently in her fifth year working with awards and her first year as co-chair, she said that provincial recognition for the KIRAs seems to be building.

"It's been the last couple years that we've seen it really start to take hold provincially," she said.

"At the end of the day, it's about what IT does for New Brunswick."

Curtis Howe, president of Mariner Partners Inc. in Saint John, won the KIRA for industry person of the year on the strength of his work with PropelSJ - a non-profit organization in Saint John focused on supporting the formation of new IT companies in southwestern New Brunswick.

"These awards, I think, do a lot to boost the industry," he said before the ceremony. "It's a great leveler in terms of allowing companies in New Brunswick to compete on the national stage."

Under the banner of Launch32, PropelSJ is attempting to help 32 new companies start up in a 36 month period.

In the past 18 months, the project has been able to help get eight new companies off the ground, with six more ready to go.

Mr. Howe said that though he appreciated the nomination, it was much more than an individual effort.

The project had the support of organizations like Enterprise Saint John, the University of New Brunswick Saint John and Business New Brunswick.

"It would be important that everyone understands that the accomplishments at PropelSJ are the accomplishments of a wide group of people," he said. "It really is a community effort."

Other winners of the night included PQA Testing Inc., a Fredericton company providing software quality assurance which won in the export service and employment growth categories; and Spielo, a global gaming industry supplier in Moncton that grabbed the export product KIRA.

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