

You are What You Sell

Continuous learning is no longer an option

BY WAYNE VANWYCK

You can make a difference. Professional, knowledgeable, creative salespeople are still the drivers of sales in a complex world. As product prices are slashed and individual products become commodities available from the internet, what differentiates you from your competition is you and the extra value you can add because of your abilities, understanding and experience. You are the unique part of the equation.

Let's assume for a moment that this is a good thing. What is it about you that makes you unique? What additional value do you provide? Are you creative? Are you well read? Do you know distinctive ways to solve your clients' problems? Can you confidently advise your client to work with you because you know you offer more value?

A recent Globe and Mail article suggests that people increasingly understand the importance of this uniqueness and are sharpening their abilities to add value to their client relationships. A survey by the Canadian Council on Learning found that 73.4% of adults who take work relat-



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ed training do so because they want to learn something new, and almost 69% take courses in order to perform more effectively in their current jobs.

What I found interesting was that as many as 66% of employees between 20 and 34 had taken work-related training in the past year. If you were part of the 34% that didn't, you might be losing your edge to your competition. Continuous learning is necessary to continue to add value to your client relationships. Without it, you could become a liability instead of an asset.

Sometimes during workshops I'll ask salespeople to think about the most successful salesperson they

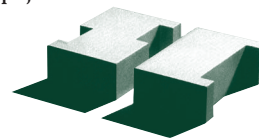
**You are the unique
part of the equation.**

know. Then I ask them to give me 20 attributes of a successful salesperson. After making the list, we'll consider the items they came up with and usually 85% to 90% of them have to do



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with what's going on between the ears of the salesperson. They have trained their minds. They are genuinely confident, not cocky. They are knowledgeable. They take responsibility. They are creative, focused and imaginative. They are disciplined. They are great listeners and that helps them to be great problem solvers. In other words, they have become the kind of person that their clients can look to for solutions to their unique issues.

Are you enhancing your ability to give more value to your clients? Have you invested in the one thing that can

really set you apart – your ability to think? Have you taken a disciplined

Are you enhancing your ability to give more value to your clients?

approach to adding to your bank of knowledge, skill and ability? Consider which is more valuable – a computer with a blank hard drive, or one which

has already been loaded up with the most up-to-date software you need to be productive?

If you want to continue to enhance the value you offer to your clients, take action on some of the following suggestions:

- Read something of value every day. Get in the habit of reading books on selling, negotiating, problem solving, leading, managing, personal development, etc. One half hour of reading a day will give you new ideas and competencies that you can share with your clients.
- Take courses from experts who can give you new ways of seeing things, new techniques, or even remind you of all the classic things you used to do that worked.
 - Get a mentor.
 - Get a coach.
- Listen to audio CDs while you drive or exercise. You can get wonderful books and courses that enable you to learn while your body is occupied doing something else.
- Develop an insatiable curiosity. If something intrigues you, ask questions and get the answers.
- Assume that you can learn something of value from everyone you meet.
- Go on sales calls or role play with

**Continuous learning
used to be a nice
idea. Today it is
absolutely required.**

someone who is more successful than you to find out what they might be doing differently.

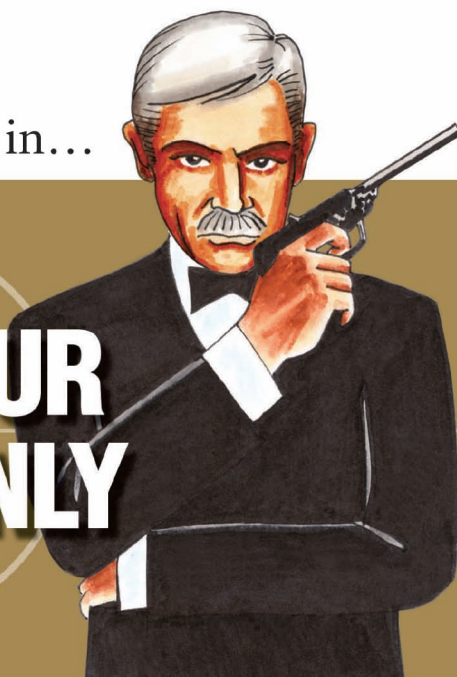
- Take time to think. Not just minutes, but hours. Unclutter your mind so it is free to develop new solutions.
- Listen to your clients. What are they telling you about the way you should be adding value to their lives?

Why should someone buy from you instead of purchasing directly from the internet? Do you add significant value to the client, making what they purchase better aligned with their needs and wants? To have value to give, you need to have invested in yourself first to put the value in.

Continuous learning used to be a nice idea. Today it is absolutely required.

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Active or Passive Investing: Which is Best?

Contrary to the typical either/or argument, they work best when combined

BY DANIEL E. GIRARD

My partner and I run a fee-based investment management practice. As such, we have no bias towards which investments we use to build our clients' portfolios. The only criteria we concern ourselves with is what will provide the best risk-adjusted investment returns. In this reality – in which we're fortunate to find ourselves – we spend considerable time contemplating one of the investment industry's most heated debates: active versus passive investing.

Passive investing pundits believe that active portfolio management (for example, mutual funds) offers no value and is therefore, by extension, a waste of time and money. Consistent with the Efficient Market Hypothesis, postulated and popularized by Eugene Fama in the 1960s, they believe that all available information is already factored into a security's price. Therefore, all forms of research are a waste as they produce no consistent benefit.

Active managers, on the other hand, maintain that enough inefficiencies exist in capital markets that intellectually sound research can produce higher average returns than the general market.

In actuality, both are correct.

Certain asset classes are better suited to a passive approach, while others can be profitably exploited through active management. For example, large, well-followed asset classes with relatively low expected returns, such as blue-chip dividend paying stocks and investment-grade bonds, lack the inefficiencies required to allow active managers to earn their keep. Therefore, a passive approach is economically superior. However, in other less popular sectors, such as mid and small-capitalization stocks and high yield (i.e. junk)

bonds, the proper active manager can add a tremendous amount of value, or what's called "alpha" in investment management – the extra return a manager earns over the benchmark.

For a combined active-passive strategy to work properly, however, it's important to utilize the right type of active manager, as the vast majority of broad-based mutual fund managers are, in my opinion, simply closet indexers (a closet indexer is a manager whose portfolio looks very similar to the benchmark index they follow. In which case, you're paying a relatively high fee, higher than an index fund, to get index-like results, not an economically sound strategy). In general, the right type of manager to hire



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**Therefore, a passive
approach is
economically superior.**


will: own their own firm; have fairly free reign in their investment process; be fairly small in regards to asset size; and have an absolute return mindset rather than relative return (meaning they care more about consistent positive returns rather than simply beating an index).

The Efficient Market Hypothesis, and therefore passive investing, contends that humans are "rational utility-maximizing agents". Well, if you've had any firsthand experience with people (and I for the most part am one), the assertion that

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we're rational may be tough to swallow. Especially in light of Nortel, the Pet Rock, and reality TV. However, we are rationale enough to make passive investing the superior strategy for some markets.

Therefore, to generate the best possible risk-adjusted returns, utilize index vehicles for the core of your portfolio, and then hire elite-level active managers for the less-efficient asset classes. You'll be using the best of both worlds and leaving the academic debate to those who care more about discussing such theoretical things than making money. 

BUSINESS & THE LAW

The Cost of Sensitivity

Appeal reduces damages but upholds decision

BY MELANIE REIST

A few issues back I wrote about the groundbreaking decision of the Ontario Superior Court in *Keays v. Honda Canada Inc.* ("Honda") in which Mr. Keays was awarded, amongst other things, \$500,000 in punitive damages. Mr. Keays suffered from chronic fatigue syndrome and in the opinion of the trial judge had been dealt with in a manner which invited a significant award of punitive damages. The object of punitive damages is to punish the defendant rather than to compensate the plaintiff.




MELANIE REIST IS A CIVIL LITIGATION LAWYER AND A PARTNER IN THE KITCHENER FIRM OF CHARLES MORRISON & MELANIE REIST.

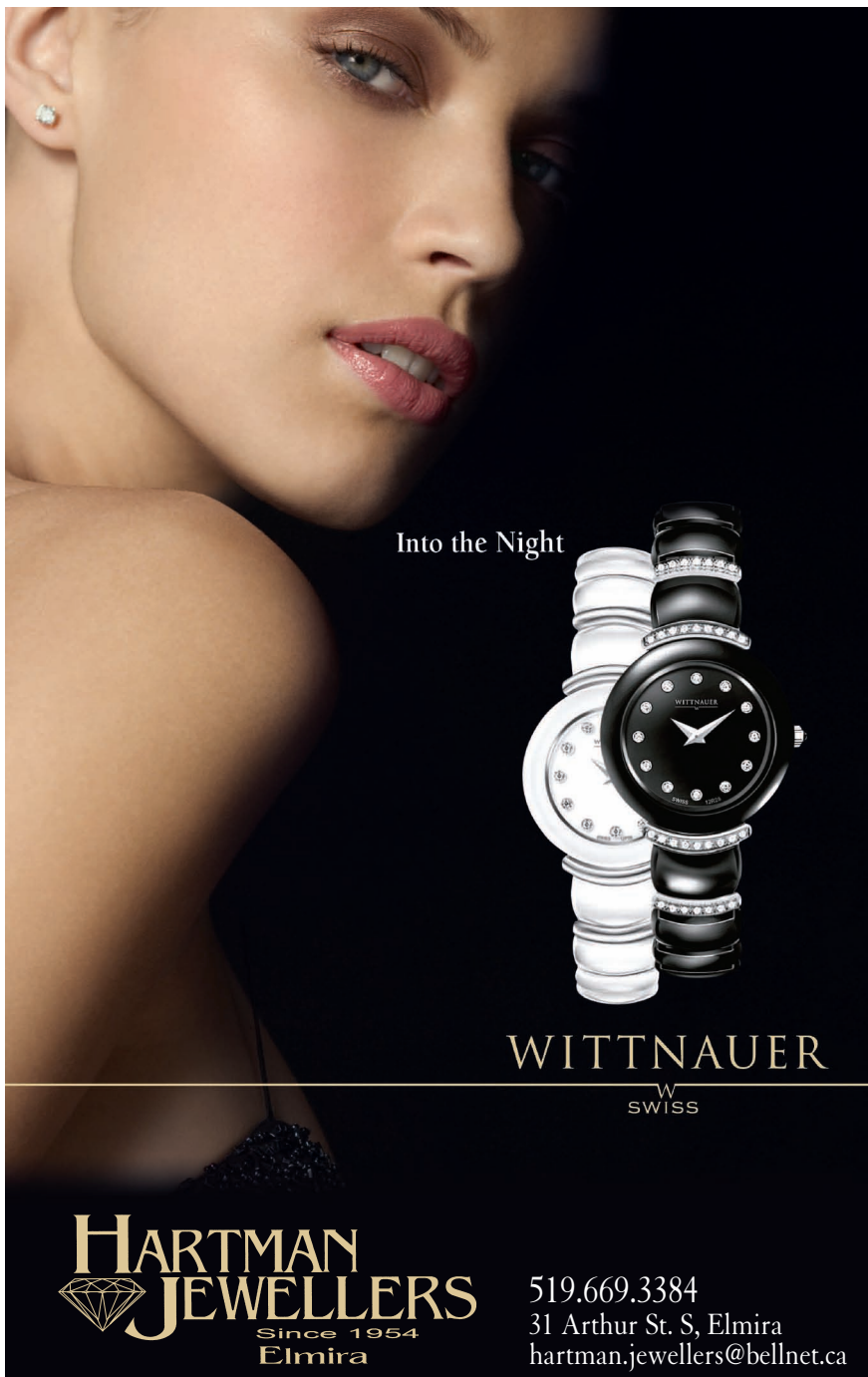
The Court found that, overall, he was treated with gross insensitivity.

In this case Honda had required Mr. Keays to justify his medical absences because of his particular disability, when employees with "mainstream" illnesses were not so required. Due to absences caused by his disability, Honda subjected him to the first step in the discipline process and then refused to remove the disciplinary "coaching" from his record. It also required him to attend an interview with the company doctor where his disability was belittled, and the Court found that, overall, he was treated with gross insensitivity.

What limited accommodation Honda gave him was cancelled in retaliation for his having retained a lawyer to advance the rights guaranteed to him by the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Honda appealed many aspects of the decision, including the award of punitive damages.

A Court of Appeal recently released its decision and while it reduced the punitive damages award from \$500,000 to \$100,000, it is a significant decision for employers and employees in Ontario. 



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Greg Voisin, long-time vice president of **M&M Meat Shops**, responsible for franchise development, is selling his 25% share of the company. M&M Meat Shops is led by Voisin's brother, **Mac Voisin**, who holds 75% of the company's shares. Greg Voisin has been with the company for almost two decades; he had recently retired from day-to-day responsibilities at M&M.

A statement issued by M&M said, "Greg Voisin will be selling his shares in M&M Meat Shops and leaving the organization. Greg's shares will be offered for sale privately through an investment bank that specializes in these transactions to a purchaser that will be mutually agreed to by Mac and Greg."

The statement continues: "Greg now believes it is in M&M Meat Shops' best interest to replace his ownership with a shareholder who will actively support M&M Meat Shops' strategy to take the company to its next level of greatness. Greg continues to believe M&M Meat Shops is one of the best run companies in Canada and he is very proud to have been part of its growth and development."

Voisin, and his wife **Marie**, plan to focus on family and philanthropic projects: "Since his recent trip to Rwanda, one of Greg's new interests will be to help others while he and Marie have the personal and financial resources to do so."

M&M Meat Shops will remain a private company and Mac Voisin will continue as Chairman. He will retain significant majority ownership of the company. The statement stresses that there is "no intention of selling the company, becoming a public company or an income trust." Mac added: "I'm here for the long haul, folks, and I hope that's clear."



Greg Voisin



Second Foundation sponsored the Martini Bar at the recent **Junior Achievement Business Excellence Awards**. JA is one of Second Foundation's preferred charitable organizations. JA provided the ice sculpture. The Second Foundation Consulting team, left to right, are **Aaron Flint, Tom Millen, Tim Oliner, Tom McNulty, Don Critelli, Steve Aho, and Stephen McInnes**.

Investment in private Research and Development in Waterloo Region climbed to over \$290 million in 2004, up 90.4% from 1995 levels. A study reveals that the total for 2004 represents approximately 1.5% of **Canada Technology Triangle's** Gross Domestic Product for the same year. Ontario's rate of R&D as a percent of GDP is 1.4% while Canada's rate is 1.1%.

"The continued rapid growth in R&D activities reflects the innovative nature of Canada's Technology Triangle and is build upon our formidable institutions of high learning," says **John Tennant**, CEO of CTT.

Known for a diverse economy in advanced manufacturing, automotive, high technology, and business and financial services, the level of investment in R&D in the service sector is noteworthy. In Canada's Technology Triangle, 2004 R&D expenditures within the manufacturing sector reached \$212,521,000, and service sector R&D expenditures reached \$67,634,000. Between 1995 and 2004, service sector R&D increased 109.9%, outpacing the 91.1% increase in manufacturing R&D.



Iain Klugman

The study evaluated R&D spending on an industry basis and found the top three to be: Machinery, which invested over \$32 million; Motor Vehicle and Parts at over \$30 million; and Computer System Design and Related Services at over \$27 million in R&D investment in 2004.

Compared with provincial levels, a number of CTT industries have a significant proportion of R&D, including the Plastic Product Industry which accounted for 21.8% of Ontario's Plastic Product R&D expenditures. Other CTT industries that had a disproportionately higher share of provincial R&D included the Textile Industry (17.6%); the Machinery Industry (11.6%); and the Fabricated Metal Industry (9.5%).

Sectors that showed the most rapid growth between 1995 and 2004 included: the Motor

Vehicle/Parts Industry, 482.2%; Architectural, Engineering and Related Services Industry, 174.2%; Fabricated Metal Products Industry, 172.9%; Information/Cultural Industries, 116.5%.

"Programs like Canada's Scientific Research and Experimental Development Tax Credit and significant support for technology commercialization programs provide a vital advantage to Waterloo Region's research-intensive firms, helping to keep us on the leading edge of innovation," says **Iain Klugman**, President and CEO, Communitech: Waterloo Region Technology Association. "We're committed to improving that investiture to support industry."

The full report, "Private Research & Development Expenditures in Waterloo Region: Canada's Technology Triangle," is at: www.techtriangle.com/Publications/ResearchReports.cfm


Google joined many other Waterloo Region tech firms in a recruiting drive held in Mississauga in November. It was Google's first-ever such effort in the GTA. The event was Communitech's tech talent recruitment event at **Playdium**, Mississauga, on Nov. 22, 2006.

Waterloo Region tech firms recruiting on-site included: Google Waterloo, **Research in Motion (RIM)**, **Sandvine**, **Desire2Learn**, **MKS**, **Metafore**, **LSI Logic**, **Christie Digital**, **Geosign**, **Procom**, **Tech Capital Partners**, **Sirific Wireless**, **Livehive**, **Sidense**, **Covarity**, **Diskstream**, **Handshake VR** and **Software Innovation**.


Guest speakers included **Roger Skubowius** (Manager, Google Waterloo), **John Baker** (President and CEO,



Roger Skubowius




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Desire2Learn), and **Iain Klugman** (President and CEO, Communitech: Waterloo Region Technology Association).

"There's no stopping Waterloo Region's incredible growth," says Klugman. "Our tech community is in high demand for key talent, from small entrepreneurial tech ventures to tech juggernauts like RIM."

Communitech says that Waterloo Region needs to fill more than 2,000 jobs with technically skilled people, including:

- RFID and ASIC designers
- Software Developers, SAP Specialists
- Embedded Systems Developers, Infrastructure Developers
- Application Engineers, Quality Assurance Specialists
- Product Managers, Deployment Specialists
- IT and Network Administrators
- Tech Inside Sales, Marketing and Consulting Professionals.

Area universities are among the leading beneficiaries of a \$422 million grant announcement by the **Canadian Foundation for Innovation**. The **University of Waterloo** will receive \$33.4 million (\$25.6 million for infrastructure, plus \$7.7 million to operate and maintain equipment). The **University of Guelph** will receive \$14.5 million.

The CFI will hand out \$422 million for 86 projects at research institutions across Canada. UW was chosen as the locale for the funding announcement, which was done by **Eliot Phillipson**, president and CEO of CFI.

The UW grants will help fund three projects which have a total value of \$77.3 million. The projects involve work in astronomy, quantum information processing and wireless communications. UW professors are also participating in CFI-funded projects at other institutions, exploring brain developmental disorders and conducting social science research.

"These awards represent a strategic boost to the university's research capacities and represent a tremendous result from one of the strongest competitions since CFI's inception,"

said **Alan George**, UW's vice-president, university research. "We sought \$42 million for 12 projects, and had 25% of our applications and 61% of our dollar request approved, which is above the national average."

As well, three world-class research collaborations headed by University of Guelph scientists have received more than \$14.5 million from the Canada Foundation for Innovation. The Guelph projects will position the University and Canada at the forefront of X-ray diffraction, nuclear physics and life sciences and bioelectrochemistry, said **Alan Wildeman**, U of G vice-president (research).

ARISE Technologies Corporation of Waterloo has announced its financial results for the three months and nine months ended September 30, 2006. As a result of closing a major financing during the second quarter, ARISE significantly improved its cash and working capital positions. As at September 30, 2006, the company had positive working capital of \$490,999 compared to a working capital deficit of \$2,402,217 at December 31, 2005.

During the quarter, the Company has primarily focused on the process of establishing manufacturing operations in Germany, along with continued development of the company's proprietary photovoltaic cell technology and its proprietary silicon refining process. The net loss for the third quarter of 2006 was \$501,156 (\$0.02 per share) compared to a net loss of \$576,251 (\$0.04 per share) for the same period last year. The net loss for the nine months ended September 30, 2006 was \$1,697,232 compared to a net loss of \$1,338,544 for the same period last year.

Ian MacLellan, President and CEO commented "I am pleased that we continue to make good progress on our high efficiency, heterojunction PV cell and related silicon refining technology. In the third quarter, the focus on our plans for a manufacturing facility in Germany has been a very exciting new development. In addition, the SDTC \$6.5 million funding com-

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mitment in July and the Letter of Intent with Germany's Industrial Investment Council in August in respect of possible incentive grants will provide significant assistance in implementing our business plan provided that we raise the additional capital required by the plan. We are also looking forward to the Ontario Standard Offer Contract being implemented shortly which we expect will provide opportunities for ARISE to supply more solar energy systems and components into the Ontario market."

Sales for the three months ended September 30, 2006 were \$203,205, representing a 30.7% increase over the same period in 2005; however, sales declined by 32.9% from second quarter 2006.

In a controversial move, the shareholders of **Atria Networks Inc.** agreed to sell their interest in the Atria Networks business to **Birch Hill Equity Partners**. Atria's joint owners - **Cambridge and North Dumfries Energy Plus Inc., Guelph Hydro Inc., Kitchener Power Inc., and Waterloo North Hydro Holding Company** - agreed in principal to sell at a profit the telecommunications company they started six years ago. These owners are all publicly-owned utility companies.



A statement about the sale said, "Since its inception in 2000, Atria Networks (formerly **Fibretech Telecommunications** and **Guelph Fibrewired**) has satisfied a demand for local high-speed data services previously unmet by the private sector. Having accomplished the objectives of its original mandate, Atria's continued success in a restricted market space would become increasingly difficult."

"Regional telecommunications is now a



Ian MacLellan

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very sophisticated and fast-paced business," said **Steve McCartney**, president of Atria. "With competitive pressures mounting and new telecommunications services in strong demand, Atria's strategic growth dictates a need for capital investment and access to a larger market."

"We see a tremendous untapped potential for fibre-optic data services," said Birch Hill principal, **Thecla Sweeney**. "Our involvement as an equity partner will allow Atria to grow and pursue opportunities in its current markets as well as those previously beyond its corporate mandate."



Steve McCartney

The statement said, "Birch Hill is committed to continuing investment in Atria's community initiatives such as free Wi-Fi Internet in the libraries, services for the Waterloo Region Children's Museum, and early childhood literacy programs."

The November municipal elections saw several new faces emerge on the municipal scene, some as the leader of their community. The elections also saw a trend toward more gender equity on local councils.

Two area cities have new mayors. **Brenda Halloran** was easily elected in Waterloo, defeating incumbent **Herb Epp** and former Waterloo mayor **Brian Turnbull**. In Guelph, **Karen Farbridge** defeated incumbent **Kate Quarrie** in the mayoral race.



Brenda Halloran

Long-time Waterloo Regional Chair **Ken**



Karen Farbridge

nesses time and money and small business owners feel ill-served by their provincial government; these are the key findings of a new **Canadian Federation of Independent Business** report: "Serving up Better Government: SMEs and Government Customer Service".

More than 80% of respondents said that an improvement in government customer service would save their business valuable time and money by eliminating layers of red tape. "Taking measures to improve government customer service is a key tool to reduce the cost of regulatory compliance on businesses – now pegged at \$12.8 billion annually in Ontario," said CFIB Director of Provincial Affairs **Satinder Chera**.

Alarming, nearly 90% of small business owners believe their provincial government does not understand the realities of running a small business, a group that represents government's repeat customers. Most disturbing of all is the fact that four in ten business owners say they are not treated with respect by provincial government staff.

"Few businesses would survive if 40% of their customers did not believe they were treated with respect," said Chera. "When it comes to the services provided by government, entrepreneurs are the customers, but they don't have the luxury of taking their business elsewhere."

The report also measures small business satisfaction with the Ontario government on accessibility and consistency of information (both services were rated as fair or

Seiling easily won re-election, as did Kitchener Mayor **Carl Zehr**. **Doug Craig** was re-elected Mayor of Cambridge.

Poor government customer service is costing

Ontario busi-

nesses time and money

and small business

owners feel ill-served by their provincial

government; these are the key findings of a

new **Canadian Federation of**

Independent Business report: "Serving

up Better Government: SMEs and

Government Customer Service".

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poor by 69% of respondents), and promptness or replies (64%).

RDM Corporation has reported financial results for the three and twelve-month periods ended September 30, 2006. Total revenues for fiscal 2006 were \$24.3 million, an increase of \$4.9 million or 25% from \$19.5 million in 2005, despite the negative impact of the continued strengthening of the Canadian dollar.

Revenue growth was driven by a 70% increase in the Digital Imaging segment, which comprised 70% of total revenues in 2006. Net earnings were \$2.1 million or \$0.10 per share in 2006, up from earnings of \$757,000 or \$0.04 per share in 2005. The 172% increase in net earnings was attributable to revenue growth, operating leverage, and the recognition of an \$850,000 future income tax asset as a result of the continued profitability of the company. Excluding the impact of the tax asset, earnings from operations grew 68% to \$1.3 million from \$757,000 in 2005.

The number of U.S. banks that have selected RDM's ITMS(R) service as their remote deposit capture solution grew from seven at the start of the year to 15. The majority of these banks are among the 50 largest in the U.S. ITMS end user locations, a key indicator of growth in transaction volumes, increased from 386 to 3,300 during fiscal 2006.

"2006 was another year of very solid execution for RDM. We saw a significant expansion in the segment of our business we are counting on to drive future growth, and we maintained positive earnings in the other segments," said **Douglas Newman**, President and CEO of RDM.



Douglas Newman



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On-demand logistics software and services specialist **The Descartes Systems Group Inc.** will acquire certain assets of privately-held Toronto company **Cube Route Inc.** The all-cash transaction is scheduled to close during Descartes' fiscal quarter ending January 31, 2007.

Cube Route provides on-demand logistics management solutions that include planning, routing, sequencing and optimizing of delivery routes, real-time driver and vehicle tracking, and delivery route analysis. Offered on a pay-as-you-go subscription basis, Cube Route's solution for last mile logistics is used by distribution-sensitive organizations to lower operating costs, improve customer service and reduce operational complexity.

The Working Centre is hosting a new program to connect Kitchener-Waterloo employers in the tourism and hospitality sector with skilled immigrants. Through the **Ready to Work Program: Tourism & Hospitality Careers for Newcomers**, part of a province-wide effort with other pilot sessions offered in

Toronto and Ottawa, employers will have access to a pool of skilled newcomers who have an interest and background in the sector and who have gained relevant Canadian training and certificates. The program is set to launch in February.

As the local project partner, The Working Centre will be able to offer local employers training incentives and wage subsidies through the provincially funded Job Connect employment program, pre-screened candidates for positions, job posting services, opportunities to participate in job fairs and other recruiting services, as well as on-the-job coaching.

Participants will benefit from earning certificates in five key areas: Tourism Essentials, Service Excellence, Smart Serve, WHMIS and Safe Food Handling. The training will be delivered by the senior project partner, **Ontario Education Tourism Corporation**, an industry body that serves the training and human resource development needs of the tourism and service sectors. OTEC is the exclusive certifying body in Ontario for tourism occupations for the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council. Ready to Work is funded by the **Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration**.

Conestoga College opened its new campus in Waterloo in November. The campus, located in a former secondary school at 108 University Ave. E., is in the first stages of a transformation that will see it become a centre for excellence in skills education in: hospitality and culinary services, construction-related skilled trades, innovative programs that combine technical diploma studies with apprenticeship experience and co-op education, basic skills education and upgrading, English language training for new Canadians and international post-secondary students, and a resource centre related to employment research and



job-finding skills. The facility also offers part-time, evening and weekend adult education courses in many different career-oriented and personal interest areas.

Guest of honour was **Mike Holmes**, star of television's **Holmes on Homes** and creator of **The Holmes Foundation**, which supports excellence and education in the skilled trades.

Nine organizations in Waterloo Region will receive \$814,000 in grants from the **Ontario Trillium Foundation**.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation, an agency of the Ministry of Culture, receives \$100 million annually from Ontario's charity casino initiative. Local allocations are:

Alliance for a Grand Community c/o Waterloo Arts Council: \$162,500 over three years for a collaborative of nine regional art organizations to undertake initiatives and strategies that lead to sharing best practices and expertise, peer mentoring and increased public awareness of the art sector's contribution.

Grand Music Incorporated: \$13,000 over six months to hire an administrator for the Grand River Baroque Festival in Kitchener.

Junior Achievement of The Waterloo Region: \$90,000 over three years to expand two new programs that were piloted in Waterloo Region last year for Grade 4 and Grade 6 classes. The aim is to reach 1,500 students every year to develop job-readiness skills.

KidsAbility Centre for Development: \$119,700 over two years to develop an innovative community-based transition system, to help teens with physical disabilities gain access to agencies offering adult services in Waterloo Region.

KW Woodworking and Craft Centre: \$52,100 over one year to purchase machinery and safety equipment for a woodworking and craft centre, which will provide recreation for local seniors.

KW YWCA: \$75,000 over one year to improve the building's safety and security systems for 700 women and their children who are homeless, and to offer safer services for victims of domestic violence.

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Conestoga Hospitality Management and Culinary Management Students, President John Tibbits (far left front row), Chef Instructor Mike Magda (centre, back row with chef hat), Mike Holmes of Holmes on Homes Show (centre right with overalls, and above), and Waterloo Campus Dining Room Manager and Instructor Jean Paul Bernhard far right, at the official opening of the new Waterloo campus.

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The **University of Guelph's** commitment to increasing scholarship support for graduate students received a major boost in November, courtesy of a \$500,000 gift from the **Bank of Montreal (BMO) Financial Group**. The gift will be used to establish an endowment fund that will eventually support five annual graduate scholarships, valued at \$15,000 each. The first beneficiary of the BMO fund is **Lorna Deeth**, a master's student in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics.

Thought Turbine revved up its idea engine on Nov. 15, 2006. Based in Kitchener, Thought Turbine provides an economical idea generation service custom-tailored to each client's specific needs; www.thought-turbine.com

More than 100 industry and association representatives, **Conestoga College** officials and faculty, and apprentices gath-

ered at the Guelph Conestoga campus Nov. 14 for the official opening of the **Truck and Coach Technician Centre**.

The centre is a major part of an expanded motive power trades area at the campus and involved construction of 3,200 sq. ft. of new shop space. Motive power education, which now includes two apprenticeship programs – Automotive Service Technician, and Truck and Coach Technician, is a campus specialty. The impetus provided by the facility promises opportunities for more diversified and specialized programming.

A number of trucking industry donors and supporters have been advocates for establishment of the Truck and Coach Technician Centre, and have provided equipment, supplies and materials.

Featured speakers at the event were: **Dan Einwechter**, Chairman and CEO of **Challenger Motor Freight Inc.**, who spoke on behalf of the industry donors; Conestoga President **John Tibbits**, who outlined the importance of the new facility and how this development fits in with the College's long-term plans; Conestoga Chair of Trades and Apprenticeship **Stephen Speers**, and student **Darrin Lockwood**.

Merrill Lynch initiated coverage of **Torstar Corp.** with a 'sell' rating on the basis that the two core businesses of the Toronto-based newspaper and book publisher are in a state of decline. Torstar has



From left, Waterloo Region Business Achievement Award nominees Dave Timlock, President of Collaborative Structures Limited and wife Shawna Timlock, along with Don Gosen, President Gosen Electric Ltd. and Sergio Cres, ITS Analyst with Economical Insurance Group.



Steve Farlow, Executive Director of the Schlegel Centre for Entrepreneurship listens to Junior Achievement's Waterloo Region Business Achievement Award night keynote speaker Frank McKenna, Deputy-Chair, TD Bank Financial Group, former Canadian Ambassador to the United States and former Premier of New Brunswick.

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"the misfortune of being stewards of businesses that are in the middle of being disrupted," a situation that is expected to continue until at least 2008, analyst **Joel Sutherland** wrote in a note.

The Merrill report notes that Torstar is not alone in its troubles and that the entire North American newspaper industry is "beleaguered by competitive threats."

Torstar owns a number of area publications, including **The Record**, the **Guelph Mercury**, and most local community newspapers.



Waterloo Region Business Achievement Award nominee John Keating, left, CEO ComDev hams it up with Award night sponsor Greg Durocher, General Manager Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, Hoda Mateyk, owner Les Diplomats Executive Guest House and nominee and night sponsor Dennis Watson, right, Vice President CTV Southwestern Ontario.



Waterloo Region Business Achievement Award Nominees from Gemini Model Management (l-r) Vitina Blumethal, Laurie Cadman, Sarah Hummel, CEO Audrey Wilson, Liz Bickerton and Kathleen Beckham,

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

continued from page 46

Sarah Gropp got her chance just over a year ago. By then, she had worked hard to rebuild a shattered life. Gropp candidly admits that, in the past, she had a major problem with substance abuse – cocaine, crystal meth, and heroin. Gropp, now 25, lives in Wellesley.

She kicked her habits three years ago, but prior to joining the MeMe's staff family, she had not worked in a year, spending half that time in California, the other half as a volunteer with a church-based project. Hagen was well aware of Gropp's past issues when she hired her.

Gropp's smiling face is a fixture behind the counter at the café. Her smile reflects what she says is "the fun working environment". That word – "fun" – was used by every MeMe's person interviewed for this article.

These days, Gropp spends a lot of time speaking to youth groups – primarily church groups – about getting free from drugs. She also sings to them – she's a musician, currently recording a CD of original songs.

That's another common theme around MeMe's – several of the staff members are into the arts. Andrew Thom, who like Gropp works mostly behind the counter and serving tables, is a 20-year-old artist. Thom lives in New Hamburg, and his work can be seen in at least one downtown store.

He looks ... well, like an artist. He's noted for his piercings, including "tunnels" in his earlobes. Again, not necessarily someone you might hire to serve food and beverages, but Thom laughs that his friendly attitude causes his customers to look right past his on-the-edge appearance. Like Gropp and Cressman, he talks about MeMe's clients as friends. "I love talking with everybody who comes in."

Prior to coming to MeMe's two years ago, he had worked in a number of food service jobs, including at a children's camp. He likes living in New Hamburg – provided there is a chance to head for Toronto on the weekends – and he wanted a job that was not a traditional "Tim's" style coffee outlet. He found it.

Like his colleagues, he has nothing but praise for the boss. Hagen, he says, appreciates the fact that her staff have interests outside the café – "She knows we have our own lives. I have my art.



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(l-r) Meredith Hagen, Andrew Thom, Anna Cressman and Sarah Gropp.

Sarah has her music."

There is no doubt that the staff members fit in well in the eclectic café Hagen has designed. The walls are covered with art, which changes regularly as new artists are featured. There is always interesting music playing. There are fresh flowers on every table. There seem to be no two matching chairs in the entire place.

Asked to describe her fare, Hagen says, "everything homemade, nothing fried." There are vegetarian dishes, traditional food, international touches. The cuisine is "allergy-aware", "organic when available", with local ingredients used whenever possible.

Categories on the menu board – changed daily – include soups, entrees, salads, sandwiches, quiche and wraps, along with speciality coffees and teas. But that doesn't even hint at the creativity and the pizzazz evident in the cuisine in this funky eatery. MeMe's also does take-out and catering, each of which account for 20% to 25% of the business. Corporate catering is a key element – Hagen points out that "there are 12 or 13 international businesses in this community. It's an excellent business community."

The café is open morning and afternoon only, closing before supper hour.

When it's open, it tends to be a busy place. The clientele are just what you might expect in a small town – business people, retirees, book clubs, farmers, clergy people, retail staff, young and old... and all of them interacting as

**She's a people person
who puts her hiring
policy where her mouth is.**

friends with Hagen and her team. Says the owner, "we're friendly. We know everybody by name.... I'm involved in this community."

"I care about the people," she adds. "I'm a real people person. I think people are attracted to that."

She's a people person who puts her hiring policy where her mouth is – and it has led to the formation of a unique, outgoing, service-oriented and friendly staff. A team who have rewarded risk-taking with superb results.



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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Taking a Chance and Reaping the Benefits

The creative, unusual staffers at MeMe's Café have rewarded their employer's faith in them

BY PAUL KNOWLES



Meredith Hagen, owner of MeMe's Café

What's the best thing about working here at MeMe's Café?"

"Everybody I work with," says Andrew Thom. "That's what makes me come back every day."

"The people," agrees Anna Cressman.

Sarah Gropp smiles. "I love my co-workers and I love my customers."

Another "best thing" for each of these MeMe's staffers – and their five colleagues – would be that Meredith Hagen gave them a chance when they applied for a job at the hip little New Hamburg café.

When Hagen opened MeMe's Café, five years ago last November 30, she had no intention of operating an employment agency for young people struggling to find jobs. Hagen had come home to the New Hamburg area after 25 years away – most of it spent working in the food and hospitality industry in places like Toronto, Ottawa and Tobermory – to care for her mother, who was terminally ill and "wanted me to come back." She moved to New Hamburg to raise her

young daughter in a small-town atmosphere.

For a while, she commuted to a real estate position in Toronto, but her heart was in the food industry; having previously been a personal chef in Toronto, she began doing the same for a few local families.

And then, a restaurant in downtown New Hamburg went out of business. "Next thing you know," she says with a wide smile, "two weeks later, I had the keys." During those two weeks, she had attracted some local investment – most of which has been paid back. She had chosen the name – a

"Who else is going to give them a chance? I find them interesting – they think outside the box."

combination of her initials, and those of her late mother – Meredith Elizabeth/ Marjorie Elaine. She also had to hire some staff.

Ah, the staff. While Hagen had no intention of running any kind of charitable operation, she does have a lot of faith in people, and in her own intuition. She was not afraid to take risks with people she believed in.

Those risks have paid off, every time.

One of the first to join her staff was Anna Cressman, who came to MeMe's two months after it opened. Cressman says, "I was finding it hard to find a job." She had registered with Lutherwood, the social service agency in Waterloo, and there she learned about MeMe's.

Cressman says she liked "the atmosphere, and the people," from the very start. She was a fairly introverted person – perhaps an unlikely hire for a busy café – but she says she has become more outgoing through working with Hagen. Hagen responds: "Anna came to me from Lutherwood... her life has totally changed." And now, five years later, Cressman laughs that "I do everything – kitchen, serving, closing at the end of the day..."

Cressman was one of the first of her intuitive hires, but Hagen did not stop there. She says, "I'm good at reading people." And then she smiles, admittedly that her somewhat unusual staffers are part of what makes MeMe's the successful place it is.

She asks, "Who else is going to give them a chance? I find them interesting – they think outside the box."

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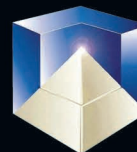
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