

SPECIAL ISSUE ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

# BC BUSINESS

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this  
year's  
winner  
is...

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EOY 2011

# entrepreneur

## OF THE YEAR 2011

**F**orging a path of your own in the business world of course takes guts and determination and hard work. But the secret ingredient that sets the successful entrepreneur apart is something you can't acquire in the classroom or through force of will. It's something you can't inherit or borrow or buy. The spark that ignites the winners of this year's annual Pacific Region Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year competition is passion – an unfiltered, raw emotional fuel that drives these select few to rise above the corporate pack.

While it's easy to imagine how pioneers like Richard Branson or Steve Jobs were driven by the prospect of world-changing products or services, passion isn't limited to these once-in-a-lifetime, game-changing discoveries. It lies where you find it. Take, for example, Ross Waters, who took over his dad's business of manufacturing industrial gaskets. As a kid Waters was fascinated by the demands of high-pressure industrial valves – not your common bathtub valve, but valves subject to heat, pressure and abrasion, valves that might be called on to do their job just once in a lifetime, but upon which an entire industry might depend. Talk to Waters for five minutes and his zeal for industrial valves will infect you.

Then there's the kind of passion for life, a zeal for people and community that some will apply to whatever endeavour they take up. Diane Johnson, for instance, is recognized as this year's outstanding social entrepreneur for devoting her career to making TV accessible to the visually impaired. And then there's Boldijarre Koronczay, whose successful childhood battle with leukemia inspired him to share the health through a line of organic skin care products.

Whether our work involves industrial valves or world health, this year's roster of outstanding entrepreneurs can teach us all a lesson in finding the inspiration to excel, whatever we do.

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photography by ROBERT KENNEY

# John Tilstra

CEO, CENTRA CONSTRUCTION GROUP LTD.

**Y**ou might say that John Tilstra saw a window of opportunity open up when BC Hydro launched its PowerSmart program back in 1989. Running a small construction firm specializing in exterior cladding at the time, Tilstra knew there was money to be made in the energy retrofit work being created by Hydro's new program of power-saving incentives.

But when he started having problems with the quality and availability of energy-efficient windows on the market, he decided the time was right to start manufacturing his own product.

"I wanted a fully integrated system where there are no delivery or supply issues and everything comes on time, all the time," Tilstra says. "It was just as windows were shifting from aluminum to vinyl, and we started out with four people."

The company expanded to 14 employees in 1996 and has since emerged as a leader in energy-conservation retrofits and home renovations in the province, with six retail locations, close to 150 employees and annual revenues of more than \$18 million.

Tilstra, now 50, is known for his "anything and everything" approach to the business, a work ethic he learned growing up on his father's dairy farm in southern Ontario. "Without a doubt, that gave me the basics of everything," he says. "I learned that you have to make a big investment to make a living and create value, that you've got to build a barn before you can milk the cows."

When he was 18, Tilstra "finished high school on Friday, left home on Monday," drove across Canada and landed a construction job in Fort Langley. "I married a Fort Langley girl and I've been here ever since," he says.

An employee-owned company, Centra's 102 "shareholders" play a direct role in the decision-making process, a dynamic that encourages quality and dedication, but also comes with its share of headaches. "The good part is they don't quit as easy. The bad part is they'll nag the hell out of you to make changes," Tilstra says. "But you have

to let them make decisions because it's up to them to see that the company works." — Brennan Clarke



## RUNNER-UP

# Darren Smail

OWNER AND PRESIDENT,  
AFFILIATED ROOFERS LTD.

**R**oofing and business are in Darren Smail's blood. His father owned a roofing company and his family is full of self-starting entrepreneurs. The 45-year-old, who struggled with addiction for 15 years, overcame the odds and bought Affiliated Roofers in 2007. Giving back to the community that helped him recover is a large part of his business. "The secret to my success is in the relationships and friends that I've made over the years through the recovery community," he says. Today, Affiliated has 45 hourly employees, between 15 and 18 subcontract crews and six divisions.

— Matt Law

## What was your first real job?

Working in the warehouse at Bick's Pickles in Dunnville, Ontario.

## What was your first big break in your current business?

Our decision to start working the BC Hydro PowerSmart program.

## What's the secret to success?

Great family, great staff, open communication, consistency and quality assurance for the consumer.

## If you were a TV or movie character, who would you be?

Rodney Dangerfield in *Back to School* because he was smart enough to realize he wasn't that smart and hired guys smarter than him to do all the work.

