

# Passion key to successful company



Langley's John Tilstra, CEO of Centra Construction Group Ltd., was the recipient of the 2011 Pacific Region Entrepreneur of the Year.

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John Tilstra finished high school on a Friday and by Monday, he was on his way from Ontario to B.C.

He landed in Fort Langley, with a job in construction, and hasn't left the town or the industry since.


This was more than 30 years ago.

"I was trying to eat, just like everybody else, just make a living," he explained about what got him into construction.

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It began with 14 partners and it has grown to close to 200, including a few of the original members.

Originally specialized in providing exterior cladding for the construction industry, the company expanded to take advantage of B.C. Hydro's new program of power-saving incentives.

And when they had problems with the quality and availability of energy-efficient windows, the company began manufacturing their own products.

Tilstra is now the chief executive officer of Centra Construction Group Ltd. — made up of Centra Windows, Centra Exteriors and Centra Restorations — which has its head office in Langley.

Centra is an employee-owned company, owned by more than 100 shareholders.

Altogether, the Centra Group has more than 250 employees.

Earlier this month, Tilstra was the recipient of the 2011 Pacific Region Entrepreneur of the Year in real estate and construction.

He is quick to deflect credit for the award.

"It is not just my award, it is all the group which makes you better," Tilstra said.

"I am just the spoke in the wheels and they help me get there.

"This award is for everybody; it is a great achievement for the company."

As for what has made the company so successful, passion is the key.

"You have to have passion, without passion you don't have much," Tilstra said.

"And you have to have vision, seeing stuff four and five years out and then bringing it back (to) today."

The other key is surrounding yourself with the right people.

"Put a good team together and hire people (who) are smarter than you and then good things can happen," he said.