

Two Saskatoon companies honoured

West Wind Aviation, Great Western Brewing on top 50 best managed list

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Beer and aircraft are an unlikely pair, but two local companies that specialize in the items have found themselves on the same award-winning list.

West Wind Aviation Limited Partnership and Great Western Brewing Company Ltd. were named Tuesday as two of Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies. Now in its 15th year, the award honours excellence in Canadian-owned and managed companies with revenues of more than \$10 million. According to the Best Managed program, the 2007 winners enjoyed the highest profit revenues since the award's creation in 1993, with combined sales of \$8.5 billion and average sales growth of 31 per cent.

Management at both West Wind Aviation and Great Western Brewing say the designation is humbling.

"It's a great recognition, I guess it kind of reinforces that we're doing things right. Everyone is pretty happy around here," said Dennis Goll, president and CEO of West Wind Aviation.

The company is celebrating its 25th year in operation, and being named to the prestigious list only adds to the excitement at the Saskatoon Aerocentre, said the president, who started the two-person, one-plane business in 1983. This is the first year West Wind applied to the Best Managed competition, and while its philosophy hasn't changed since the '80s, the company is proud to be noticed for its steady service.

"We've been known in the community for our customer service and safety and we have a continuous improvement program in place. We've had it for years and I think it shows that those processes are working for us," Goll said. "Everything we've believed in from the start, we're going to carry it on and make it better."

After three years on the list, the rules dictated Great Western had to again go through the complete application process for a 2007 designation as a Best Managed company. This year, the business focused on consumers, product quality, human resources and a strategic plan to improve operations and chances with the judges. It's a tough task keeping up with a peer group that's constantly improving on best business practices, said Great Western president Ron Waldman.



CREDIT: Greg Pender, The StarPhoenix
Dennis Goll is the CEO of West Wind Aviation, which along with Great Western Brewing is one of Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies

"Each year becomes more and more difficult to qualify, and each year becomes increasingly challenging to maintain the standard because the peer group keeps moving forward," Waldman said. "And that's the challenge of 50 Best: How does one compare to best-in-class practices in Canada, and how does one compare and stay competitive on a going-forward basis?"

The opportunity to fully evaluate the company every three years is a welcome challenge for Great Western, the president said. While maintaining a management level worthy of a 50 Best designation isn't easy, the reward is worth working through the rough patches.

"In our case it has really affirmed that what we're aspiring to become and why we're working so hard to continually improve is indeed in line with some of what the best practices of what Canadian companies are," Waldman said.

Company executives spend between 60 and 80 working hours on the application said Randy Jeworski, Saskatchewan's regional leader of the Best Managed program from Deloitte and Touche LLP, one of the competition's sponsors. The National Post, CIBC and Queen's University School of Business also sponsor the award. Through all the hard work, he said, winning companies are rewarded with invaluable recognition.

"When they get bestowed this award and they can start to put that on their letterhead and businesscards, they have immediate recognition around the world in the business community. Otherwise, you really have to sell yourself . . . especially for us as people in Saskatchewan. It's not like saying we're from Toronto or Vancouver or Calgary," he said.

Saskatchewan companies have fared well in the competition before, he said. Three provincially based businesses, Yanke Group of Companies, Mega Group Incorporated and Brandt Group of Companies, have earned platinum-club status for qualifying for the award program for six consecutive years, Jeworski said. He hopes more Saskatchewan businesses work towards the title of a Best Managed company for 2008.

"There are so many other companies in Saskatchewan that I think are so deserving of this and should get into that arena," he said.

In addition to Great Western and West Wind's placement on the list, a company owned and operated by a Saskatchewan-raised businessperson re-qualified this year to keep the title of a Best Managed company. Jeff Polovick, president and CEO of The Driving Force Inc., said it was an honour to be recognized.

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