

Regina firm among winners

Murray Lyons

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SASKATOON -- Murad Al-Katib had reason to smile Saturday night in Saskatoon.

The president of Saskcan Pulse Trading Inc. of Regina saw his young company win an ABEX Award for business excellence in the New Venture category, the award coming two years to the day after he and his wife welcomed twins into their young family.

Saskcan Pulse was the only Regina company to win one of the 11 ABEX awards Saturday.

Al-Katib's company is even younger than the twins, but already there is a second processing plant involved even though the company only completed its first processing plant little over a year ago in Regina.

The second plant was the former Cancom Grains plant which Saskcan acquired on a long-term lease base.

"We acquired a second plant a mile west of Regina so now we have a full range of pulse crops -- the reds and split lentils in our new factory," he explained. "In the one we just acquired, we do green lentils, canary seed, and mustard."

Al-Katib, who grew up in Davidson in a family that had emigrated from Turkey, notes the company wouldn't have come about without his Turkish links. As the child of immigrants, Al-Katib learned both his parents' native tongue and English while growing up in Davidson where his mother eventually became mayor.

"It affected the view I had on the world growing up in Saskatchewan as a first-generation Canadian, knowing that there was a world outside of Canada and speaking a foreign language," said Al-Katib. "I use my Turkish language skills every day of the week in business."

"Let's face it. Canada was built on immigration and will need more if we want to continue to grow."

He says Saskcan brought in five key plant employees to Regina from Turkey. In addition, the company has brought in outside money to build the plant from its major Turkish investor, a large lentil processor in that country.

That investment led to 40 new jobs for the Regina area, he points out.

Al-Katib briefly worked for the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership which helped mould his views on exporting.

"A successful company in Saskatchewan in value-added processing has to find its market outside the borders of Canada and outside the borders of North America," he said. "In our case, 90 per cent of our revenue is derived outside North America."



CREDIT: Roy Antal, The Leader-Post

Murad Al-Katib, president of Saskcan Pulse Trading, shows off some of the product his company exports.

Also at the awards ceremony, Bioriginal Food & Science Corp., was named the 2003 Business of the Year.

Ten years ago, Rick and Jane Kulow arrived in Saskatoon from Boston, with the notion that a company could be built here to extract essential fatty acids from borage, a nutraceutical oilseed.

Rick Kulow paid tribute to the Saskatoon scientific and technical community linked to both government and academia that has helped Bioriginal grow to become one of the world's leading providers of essential fatty acids in the growing consumer functional foods market.

"This was where borage was being grown and also processed at the POS Pilot Plant," he said in an interview. "POS allowed us to establish some quality standards that even now is the norm in the industry."

"POS typifies the infrastructure that is here. You can argue the best place in the world for Bioriginal to be is in Saskatoon."

Saturday night's ABEX was the 20th year for the awards event, sponsored by the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. The annual gala dinner alternates between Saskatoon and Regina.

Saskatoon companies won seven of the 10 ABEX awards. In addition, Saskatoon-based Cameco Corp., which marked its 15th anniversary this month, was named to the Saskatchewan Business Hall of Fame.

The category winners were:

- New Saskatchewan product -- Pavement Scientific International of Saskatoon, whose engineers and technicians are working on new formulations of both asphalt and subgrade road material to make stronger roadbeds at lower costs.
- New venture --Saskcan Pulse Trading Inc. of Regina.
- Physical environment -- ERCO Worldwide of Saskatoon, which is the new operating company that owns pulp chemical facilities across North American including the former Sterling chemical plant in Saskatoon. In Saskatoon, the plant engineers developed a process to burn hydrogen instead of natural gas, reducing its greenhouse gas emissions 30 per cent.
- Community involvement -- Independent Medical Rehabilitation of Saskatoon and Moose Jaw. The company, led by Mark Lemstra, has established its rehab clinics within the YMCA facilities in both cities and is hoping to establish a similar clinic in Regina in 2004. The company won the award for its support of camping and other programs the Y runs for children from low-income families.
- Job creation -- Superior Millwork Ltd. of Saskatoon, which now has more than 200 employees, has seen its labour force grow significantly as the company's exports of its kitchen cabinetry to Alberta and the western United States increase.
- Marketing -- Pine View All Natural Meats Inc. of Osler. Kevin and Melanie Boldt of Osler have worked on making a trip to their farm and processing operation a genuine farm experience where a variety of all-natural products are on display.
- Service industry -- Diamonds of Detroit, a retail store in Humboldt. In an interview, owner Michelle Bankowski said more than 20 per cent of the jewelry store's sales come from outside the Humboldt trading market. She said she has worked since 1985 to make her store "the finest jewelry store" in the province.
- Investment -- Siemens Laserworks Inc. of Saskatoon has invested millions of dollars since its founding in 1995 in automated machine tools and robotics that control the process of precision metal-cutting using laser photons. Company president Dave Siemens said the company, a major

subcontractor in cutting steel and doing partial assemblies for other manufacturers such as CNH Global, now employs 125 people.

- Exports -- Bioriginal Food & Science Corp. of Saskatoon has now grown its export sales to the point where they account for 75 per cent of total corporate sales.

- Innovative Work Systems -- Yanke Group of Companies of Saskatoon has utilized what company president Scott Johnson refers to as an inverted pyramid structure to empower employees. The major Canadian trucking and logistics company also has initiated customer services bonuses, profit-sharing and other rewards to help the company achieve corporate objectives.

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