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■ **COMMUNITY FUTURES:** Pembroke company receives members choice award

SRBT overcomes adversity

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A Pembroke-based company has been recognized for overcoming adversity to continue its track record of success.

SRB Technologies (Canada) Inc. has been presented a Members Choice Award at the Ontario Association of Community Futures Development Corporations' Annual Conference. The company and its owners, Stéphane Lévesque and Ross Fitzpatrick, were nominated for the award by Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation, from which they first received an advanced loan in 2010, and a second one in June 2013.

The company received the prestigious award out of several nominations submitted by the 61 Community Futures offices from across the province. The announcement was made at the annual conference of the Ontario Association of Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDC), recently held in Huntsville.

On Sept. 26, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MP Cheryl Gallant and Darrell Ryan, the chairman of Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation, personally presented Lévesque, Fitzpatrick and their staff with the award.

Ryan told those gathered at the Boundary Road facility this is a very important award, which CFDCs across the province recognizing the company's accomplishments.

Gallant offered her congratulations to the owners and staff of SRB.

"You have the highest quality product because of the quality of your employees you have behind it," she said. "Every one of you is sharing in this award."

Lévesque agreed, saying the most important people here are the employees who made this happen through their hard work and belief in what they are doing. "This is definitely a credit to you guys," he said.

Fitzpatrick said everyone in the room has a big part of this award.

SRB Technologies (Canada) Inc. manufactures tritium-pow-



STEPHEN UHLER / DAILY OBSERVER

SRB Technologies (Canada) Inc. has been named the winner of the 2014 Members' Choice Award at the Ontario Association of Community Futures Development Corporations annual conference. Surrounded by SRB staff and those with the Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation (starting front third from left) are MP Cheryl Gallant; Stéphane Lévesque, company president; Ross Fitzpatrick, company vice-president, and Darrell Ryan, chairman of Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation.

ered light products, which are used in EXIT signs, emergency lighting in the aerospace industry, in various military applications.

It had a rough go of things since 2007, when the company had its licence suspended, due to the detection of contaminated ground water around the immediate area of the facility.

In 2010, the company was granted a five-year licence by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, and it returned to manufacturing tritium-filled light sources.

According to a detailed press release issued by the Ontario Association of CFDCs, SRB Technologies had exhausted its cash

reserves making the necessary changes to get its licence back, and was referred to the Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation, where it received its first loan to assist in the purchase of an initial supply of tritium to begin production.

"If Community Futures had not been able to provide funding, SRB would have closed," Lévesque said.

The next big change came in 2012. Until then, the Pembroke company was owned by four off-shore individuals, who took a hands-off approach and were no longer prepared to fund the company.

Lévesque and Fitzpatrick

piloted the company through this period, focusing on improving their manufacturing processes, and developed monitoring and detecting procedures to minimize the risk of releasing contamination into the environment. During this period, the company could not manufacture products using tritium.

Realizing the importance of maintaining contact with their customers, Lévesque and Fitzpatrick negotiated the purchase of tritium-filled light sources from the two competitors and installed the tritium light sources into SRB products. While this strategy caused a tremendous drain of the company's cash flow, it allowed

SRB Technologies (Canada) Inc. to remain active in the market, while addressing its issues with the Nuclear Safety Commission.

The second loan in 2013 from the Renfrew County CFDC helped them finance this move.

Since then, SRB Technologies has returned to becoming one of the world leaders in the production of tritium-powered light source products. It is now considered a model of excellence by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, and several of the company's practises are used by the commission in its monitoring guidelines.

Under the ownership of Lévesque and Fitzpatrick, the

company has returned to profitability, and the work force has increased from 14 to 41, with plans to hire six additional employees in 2014.

CFDCs offer free business counselling, loans for start-up and expansion of small business, strategic planning on local projects and community economic development in rural areas. Each CFDC is locally managed by a volunteer board of directors, funded with the support of the Government of Canada's Economic Action Plan through FedNor and FedDev Ontario.

Stephen Uhler is a Daily Observer multimedia journalist

■ **RCDSB:** Wendy Hewitt seeking second term as public school board trustee for Laurentian Valley and North Algona Wilberforce

A desire to continue representing rural students

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Wendy Hewitt wants to continue representing Laurentian Valley and North Algona Wilberforce townships as a trustee on the Renfrew County District School Board.

"Being a trustee certainly has been a very rewarding job," she said. "However, there are many challenges as well that come with working on behalf of our children and families in our rural community."

When she was first elected in 2010, Hewitt admits she did not

fully understand the role in its entirety.

"The role for sure is more complex in some ways and yet quite simple at the same time, as the priority is always what is best for our students in Renfrew County," she said.

Hewitt and her husband are the proud parents of three sons in the public education system. She said her oldest son just recently graduated with a SHSM (Specialist High Skills Major) in transportation from Fellowes High School and her other two sons are Grade 10 and 11 students also attending Fellowes.

"As my children were coming up through our public school, I volunteered my time on a weekly basis in their younger years as a reading and math assistant in the classroom and also worked as an educational assistant at Rockwood Public School," she said.

"I also had the privilege of driving my own children to Rockwood as their bus driver for many years before being elected for my first term in 2010. So I have been involved in a lot of different aspects of the education system."

Hewitt said she has been a very active trustee, visiting most

of the schools, and still volunteers when she can as a pianist to help with music programs. She currently serves on the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) and has for the past four years.

Hewitt said for the past year she has been a part of SEAC (Special Education Advisory Committee) which is made up of staff, trustees and local parent associations.

When she is not with my family and involved in the various roles of the school board, Hewitt works part-time at Murphy Funeral Home as a funeral assistant/receptionist/organist and

very much enjoys being a part of the team that is committed to ensuring all the needs are met with true compassion towards families in the community.

She also serves as one of the pianists at Wesley Community Church.

"I would like to continue my role as your school board trustee for 2014-2018 in Laurentian Valley/North Algona Wilberforce. I will continue, if elected, to make the best decisions I can for all students in Renfrew County."

Stephen Uhler is a Daily Observer multimedia journalist



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Wendy Hewitt wants to be reelected as Renfrew County District School Board trustee for Laurentian Valley and North Algona Wilberforce.

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