

## Contango Strategies Connects Science with Industry

By Elaine Carlson

Microbiology has moved beyond the lab and into the field. Thanks to people like Monique Haakensen, President of Contango Strategies in Innovation Place in Saskatoon, the resource extraction sector is increasingly harnessing the power of microbes and biological processes to decrease waste or convert it into something more valuable, optimize production systems, reduce the environmental

impact of their operations, and achieve regulatory compliance more quickly and economically.

“Microbes—from algae and bacteria to fungi and yeasts—are the most diverse and numerous organisms on earth,” Haakensen says.

“They can perform an astonishing array of feats, from eating and degrading hydrocarbons, speeding or slowing the

oxidation process, or turning contaminants such as arsenic, selenium or sulphur into less harmful, more easily captured compounds.”

Haakensen fell into the sciences almost by accident. “I took one elective in microbiology and I was hooked.” She completed her PhD in 2009, worked as a research associate examining applications of microbiology ...continued on page 5



Photo by Kevin Hogarth

Monique Haakensen, President of Contango Strategies.

# Young Aboriginal Entrepreneur Says Sport Equals Opportunity

By Dave Yanko

A supportive family, the ability to move comfortably in different circles and a helping hand from a friend are common ingredients in business success. But they take on a different twist when the subject is 24-year-old entrepreneur

Kendal Netmaker.

Netmaker, owner and founder of the flourishing Neechie Gear clothing company in Saskatoon, grew up on Sweetgrass First Nation in a single-parent family supported by social assistance. He

loved sports. He played many and excelled at several at the Cut Knife elementary school he was bused to each weekday.

When a school friend and fellow noon-hour soccer player asked him why,



Kendal Netmaker, founder of Neechie Gear.

given his skills, was he not playing on the school team, Netmaker told the boy his family could not afford registration fees and had no vehicle to transport him to and from practice and games. The next day this friend, a boy from South Africa, told Netmaker his parents wanted to help.

“From that day forward, they drove me to every soccer practice and game and they drove me back to my First Nation,” Netmaker recalls.



Photo by Calvin Fehr

“They paid my registration fees and then, two years later, they gave us their used vehicle so that all my sisters could play sports, too.”

It was the break Netmaker needed to begin distinguishing himself as an athlete, which would lead to the establishment in 2010 of Neechie Gear, an apparel company selling t-shirts, hoodies, sweats and toques online across Western Canada and at events around the province. Moreover, it was an act of kindness that would move Netmaker to set up a non-profit corporation called NG Athletics Club Inc. NG’s mandate is to develop and support youth-based sports teams in Saskatchewan.

“We could have been any clothing company dishing out five hundred bucks to the local sports team, but we want to create our own growth,” says Netmaker. “So what we did was start to create our own sports teams... we coach and mentor them right until they graduate from the program.”

Netmaker’s path to success included detours.

After moving to North Battleford to go to high school, he starred as a badminton and volleyball player who in Grade 12 earned male athlete of the year at John Paul II Collegiate. He set his sights on teaching. However, his marks weren’t quite high enough, so he accepted a volleyball scholarship to Keyano College in Fort McMurray where he earned team rookie-of-the-year honours in his freshman term and squad captain in his second—Keyano competes in the Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference.

He took university studies at Keyano and was accepted into the University of Saskatchewan College of Arts and Science in 2007. Just before classes began,

he ran into the director of the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) and shortly thereafter was back on course for a teaching career. But Netmaker scuppered those plans in final year at ITEP when he decided to act on a business idea “I’d had in the back of my head for a long time.”

He entered and won business plan competitions—including a \$10,000 third-place prize in the Brett Wilson i3 Idea Challenge—and soon he was standing at the tiller of new company earning recognition as an outstanding young Saskatchewan entrepreneur.

Netmaker has garnered numerous awards and accolades, including a CANDO 2011 Economic Developer of the Year Award (Aboriginal Private Sector Business Award) and nominations for two 2011 ABEX Awards. He was chosen from among 200 applicants to be one of 30 Canadian representatives at the G20 Young Entrepreneur Summit in Nice, France, in November 2011.

He views his quiet confidence and easy manner as gifts. And he attributes a good portion of his success to his mother, who sacrificed much to insure he and his three sisters remained focused on their education as well as their First Nation culture, where respect for all became his key value.

But it’s perfectly clear to the founder of Neechie Gear that he wouldn’t be where he is today without help from a friend. It’s no coincidence “neechie” is the short, slang form for “friend” in the Plains Cree language, or that helping youngsters get involved in sports is a big part of what Neechie Gear is all about.

“I see sport continually taking people to places they wouldn’t be if they weren’t in it. It’s about opportunity.” —

# Welcome to the Neighbourhood: Grit Finds a Good Fit in Saskatchewan

By Darrell Noakes

In October, Grit Industries Inc., with its head office in Lloydminster, Alberta, announced that the company had acquired the 91,000 square-foot former Peak Manufacturing plant in North Battleford. Driven by high customer demand, Grit had outgrown capacity at its existing facilities.

The move represents an opportunity to consolidate as well as expand, says Wayne King, Grit founder and CEO. Starting with a single rented shop nearly 30 years ago, the company had grown to five buildings, including a manufacturing facility in McMillan Industrial Park in North Battleford. Now, all manufacturing activities will be consolidated within the new facility in the Parsons Industrial Park, allowing for greater efficiencies and lower costs for customers, King says.

Since taking possession in early December, Grit began interior renovations and foundation work that will prepare the facility for the heavy machinery to be moved in, so the plant can begin production in the spring.

The expansion will produce approximately 75 initial jobs, with an investment of several million dollars. The Grit Industries group of companies currently has about 140 employees, plus a network of distributors across North America. The North Battleford facility will support approximately 75 welders, gas fitters, assemblers, plasma and equipment operators, yard people, safety and quality control specialists, electricians, general

**“Now that we’ve committed and are currently modifying the building to suit our needs, we’re finding that workers are showing up, as promised.”**

labour and management. Grit’s current group of engineers, drafting, purchasers and administrative staff will continue to expand with the business.

“Relocating to North Battleford has allowed us to have a stronger labour pool than we have in Lloydminster,” King says. “It allowed us to move into a much larger building than we could afford in Lloydminster and much larger piece of ground. We had a very co-operative city council in North Battleford that allowed us to make this work economically.”

The company had considered moving to Ontario, King says, but a combination of factors convinced him that North Battleford was the right fit.

To begin with, King’s entrepreneurial spirit and reputation as an innovator had

brought him to the attention of Enterprise Saskatchewan, the province’s agency responsible for encouraging economic development.

“I was invited at one point to be active within Enterprise Saskatchewan,” King says. “One of Enterprise Saskatchewan’s leaders is Kim Lonsdale [Director of Resources for the Sector Development division]. Kim happens to be from the Lloydminster area and went to school in Lloydminster. He called me one day and asked if I was interested in working with Enterprise Saskatchewan.

“We were committed to Saskatchewan because we had purchased a facility there about five years ago,” King says. “We have a very good working relationship with SaskEnergy in the co-development of heating technology, and we continue to work quite closely with SaskEnergy, so there was a good fit there.

“I got to know a few of the Enterprise Saskatchewan people and when they heard that I was considering relocating my company either to Ontario, which was an option for me, or to North Battleford they became quite active in soliciting my company.”

One of the most important factors in the decision, King emphasizes, was Enterprise Saskatchewan’s commitment to helping secure a qualified labour force.

In Lloydminster, a young worker can start work in the oil industry at high wages with little formal skill, King says.

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## Contango Industries: “Come to Saskatchewan if you want to succeed.”

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for the mining industry, and further recognized the growing need to transition research into application while she worked as a government scientist.

“The mining, biofuels and petroleum industries are progressing so quickly in Saskatchewan, we need to take what we’ve learned about microbes in the lab and to use this knowledge in the field, and we need to be able to respond to the environmental aspects associated with those industries in a very timely manner.”

Passionate about the opportunity to make a difference, Haakensen started Contango Strategies early in 2011 to provide a variety of services for the oil and gas sector, the biodiesel industry, and other resource extraction industries. This includes lab-based research and development, technology review and assessment, preparation and review of project proposals and technical proposals, process streamlining, and much more.

What distinguishes Contango Strategies from other players in the burgeoning environmental and industrial remediation marketplace, however, is Haakensen’s commitment to integrating innovative environmental practices with sound business processes. “The scientific solutions we come up with have to make financial and business sense. When we consider solutions to specific problems, we need to make certain these are actually feasible to implement. Science may look beautiful in the lab, but it must also work on-site.” That’s where Contango’s Chief Financial Officer and Haakensen’s husband comes into the picture; Kevin Haakensen, a CFA charter holder with over a dozen years of experience, applies

his considerable business and financial acumen to develop feasibility studies, technology assessments, and cost/benefit and probability risk analyses of solutions Contango either examines or proposes. Contango also undertakes related market research on behalf of clients.

It’s this approach to integrating good environmental practices with good business practices that is garnering the positive attention that Contango is receiving. Haakensen was recently named one of Canada’s Future Entrepreneurial Leaders (FuEL) by Profit Magazine for her approach.

Contango Strategies is also performing all of the lab work and providing scientific oversight on the MAVEN project (Microbial Assessment for Value-Added, Environmental and Natural Resources) that includes Cameco Corporation and project lead Genome Prairie, a not-for-profit bioscience and bioethics research body that works closely with government, industry and academia—in this case, the University of Saskatchewan; Dr. Tony Kusalik is providing oversight and direction on the software development component. MAVEN recently received almost \$1.5 million from Enterprise Saskatchewan and Western Economic Diversification Canada for software development. Although this project will focus on sediments from Cameco’s Key Lake mining operations with a view to understanding how microbes present in the sediments might be put to practical use to reduce the environmental impact, as well as the time and compliance costs of mine site remediation, the knowledge gained could have important applications

for other mining and milling operations in the country.

Contango’s future looks good and Haakensen recently hired a number of bright Masters and PhD candidates on internships for project-based work, and hopes to recruit more.

“We give them the experience they need, and they give us access to their ideas. I now have people with knowledge in toxicology, microbiology, agricultural bioresearch, and computer sciences and access to others by virtue of the relationships I’ve been able to build here.” Contango is also expanding its lab space to add a genetics sequencer suite—the first of its kind in western Canada that will be used for environmental work.

“When I started Contango Strategies, I had a business plan, but it has progressed much more rapidly than I could have imagined,” says Haakensen. “There is a huge marketplace out there, and Saskatchewan is proving to be a great place to be located. Not only are we well-placed in terms of the resource sector, but people here want to see you succeed. They want to help you out. Saskatchewan has been relatively untouched in an otherwise shaky global economy. People are doing something different here, and it is working. Now we need to start telling people what’s going on to encourage more people move here to work. Come to Saskatchewan if you want to succeed.”

To learn more about Contango Strategies and how it works with industry to safeguard the environment, visit <http://www.contangostrategies.com/>

# The Two-Twenty: Saskatoon's First Co-Working Space and Creative Hub

By Elaine Carlson

Curtis Olson and Carrie Catherine are no strangers to urban renewal.

Olson, formerly a musician and now an engineer, and Catherine, a musician and event producer, have brought new life to a number of old or abandoned buildings in Saskatoon's historic Riversdale area, creating trendy studio and performance venues for Saskatoon's arts community. An abandoned church became The Chorch: A Place of Art Worship that brought a variety of arts organizations and performers together for the first time; amid so much enthusiasm, Olson and Catherine knew they were onto something. An empty neighbourhood grocery store in the same area was converted into The Hayloft, a building that not only serves as the entrepreneurial couple's home, but includes offices and a space used to host house concerts.

The most recent example of the duo's vision for integrating urban renewal and development with an artistic and creative vibe is The Two Twenty.

"The Two Twenty is Saskatoon's first co-working office, performance and meeting space in a café environment," explains Olson.

Once a furniture store, the 17,500 square foot building includes The Den, a 1,000-square foot event venue on the lower level that's flexible enough to be used for a fashion marketplace of local designers one evening and pilates classes or a concert venue the next; eight studio spaces in the basement level that accom-

Carrie Catherine and Curtis Olson, creators of the Two-Twenty.



Photo by Calvin Fehr

modate work that is messier and louder than could be tolerated in office spaces, and an upper level of 22 offices ranging from shoe-box size suitable for one to offices able to accommodate four people. The main floor includes a café—Collective Coffee—open to the public and offering the “best latté in the city”, and a co-working space that Olson describes as the social glue of the community. It includes shared work space, shared kitchen, and shared meeting and conference rooms—all supported by access to wifi, printers and other amenities.

“When we charted the course for The Two Twenty, we hoped to create a space for small entrepreneurs, designers, and creative industries where people could work professionally, but also one that generated the a sense of community and the kind of creative synergies you get when you bring people together in a café-like atmosphere,” says Olson.

Their instincts were right. The \$1.2 million renewal project had so much appeal to Saskatoon’s creative community that all but one office and one studio have been rented.

“We have 60 permanent tenants, and another 20 people on co-working memberships who pay a small drop-in fee or monthly membership to use the amenities, and more importantly, to be part of a community of like-minded people,” Olson says. Olson’s and Catherine’s company, Shift Developments, recently acquired the building next door to expand the space and accommodate even more tenants waiting to be part of the co-working experiment.

Olson and Catherine have not gone unnoticed for their dedication to urban renewal and the arts. They were 2010 nominees for the Lieutenant Governor’s

Arts Award for Leadership. They also serve on the Community Advisory Committee for the City of Saskatoon’s Culture Plan as well as the Riversdale Business Improvement District.

“Our grand opening in October was a real demonstration of the kind of synergies that can be generated when creative people work together,” says Catherine. “The photography studio projected social media onto the walls of the co-working space during the party, we had a number of artists performing on the event space, the silk screening tenant sold t-shirts, and we were able to engage other tenants, including a photographer, an audio studio, a publicist, a theatre company, and two of our larger non-profit tenants—Saskatchewan Environmental Society and Saskatchewan Waste Reduction Council who have helped tremendously with energy management and conservation in this building,” she says.

“We’ve found that people here want to contribute to the community over and above just writing a rent cheque. It’s working very well,” said Catherine, adding with a laugh, “Before long, we’ll have assembled all the different talents and personalities we need to produce one of the best festivals Saskatoon will ever see, right on 20th Street.”

Find out more at:  
<http://thetwotwenty.ca/>

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## Grit Finds Good Fit

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“I was told that North Battleford was a different climate. I had a hint of that because I already had a shop there. There’s a reliable and relatively skilled workforce. They were happy to have a job and were loyal.

“With the help of Enterprise Saskatchewan, working with the local community college, the local city council and the economic development groups, they assured me that there was labour available. Now that we’ve committed and are currently modifying the building to suit our needs, we’re finding that workers are showing up, as promised.”

The move has created local employment for skilled workers who previously

left the region for jobs.

“The alumni from North Battleford for years had moved away because of the minimal opportunities that were available there,” King says. “Now that they see that there’s some opportunity for them to move back, we’ve got quite a response from tradespeople wanting to move home. They’re tired of working away from home and they want to move back to be with their families.”

The move has also created a demand for new trade skills training, a role that King is fully prepared to support.

“We’re working toward incorporating a trade school within my facility,” he says. “The welding component will benefit

from our very modern CNC cutting equipment and bending equipment and the need for different levels of welders. We would in turn benefit by having the labour and having readily available young people to train and help us with our needs.

“We really have a lot of confidence in Saskatchewan. I’m a farm boy, born and raised in Alberta, but I’ve got holdings in Saskatchewan. I’ve worked a lot in Saskatchewan. I know the people. There’s nowhere else in the world that you’ll find harder working people than in Saskatchewan. We’re just happy to move into the neighbourhood.” ↘

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