





TOP 50 CEO AWARDS

Economic news is rarely a harbinger of good fortune. From rising tax rates and fiscal deficits to outmigration and energy woes, it would be easy to climb aboard the naysaying bandwagon, and accept whatever future falls in our path. But that's not how we roll in Atlantic Canada.

Here, on Canada's easternmost shores, in a region that buffers the rest of the country from North Atlantic gales, you will find some of the most resilient people on the planet. From the humblest fishing enterprise to leading global businesses, history shows that this is a place of strength. Strength of mind. Strength of character. Whatever our regional woes, we have always pulled through thanks to creative problem solving and intellectual ingenuity.

The most venerable of all Atlantic Canadian entrepreneurs, K.C. Irving, once famously remarked: "I like to see wheels turn."

So do we. Which is why we publish this, our annual salute to corporate leadership excellence. The following pages offer an intriguing glimpse into the minds of some of the most accomplished and successful businesspeople in Atlantic Canada today.

How were the Top 50 CEOs selected? What were the judging criteria? How can you submit a nomination for next year? Answers to these questions and more at: atlanticbusinessmagazine.com



PRESIDENT
MIKE ASHAR
IRVING OIL LIMITED

DOWN TURN Though 2003 to 2007 were boom years for the oil refining and marketing industry, there's been a significant downturn since 2008 (when Mike Ashar joined Irving). It's much harder to prosper in lean times, but Ashar is confident that a clear strategy and focused execution will turn the corporate culture around.

GOING THE DISTANCE Ashar, an ultra-marathon runner who believes healthier employees make for a healthier company, introduced the Irving Oil LiveWell program early last year. They now have daily classes for employees (yoga, belly dancing), stair challenges, swimming lessons, hockey at lunch, nutrition and health classes, Fresh Fruit Fridays and oatmeal breakfasts.

PUSHING THROUGH "In the late 1990s, I was responsible for the first mega oil sands project for Suncor. About six months into it, we had serious cost concerns due to a changed economy in Alberta. The next 18 months were like Dante's Inferno. However, we finished well, and now some 10 years later, it is judged as one of the best projects in the oil sands. What I learned from that experience is that when things are difficult (at work, or in the last six miles of a marathon), keep giving your best, motivate others around you to give their best, don't ever hold back — nine times out of 10, perseverance will be rewarded."

CEO
CATHY BENNETT
BENNETT GROUP OF COMPANIES

SPECIAL ORDER What does a successful chain of nine McDonald's restaurants have in common with residential real estate, commercial properties and a small construction company? Two words: Cathy Bennett. Through her volunteer work and board memberships, this dynamic business owner is also the point of convergence for a host of organizations: the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, Business Coalition of N.L., Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Ronald McDonald House N.L., Festival 500, The N.L. Learning Partnership, Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, Bull Arm Site Corporation and Nalcor Energy. (There's more, but our fingers got tired.)

LOVIN' IT Dissatisfied with a proposed work schedule for restaurant renovations, Cathy Bennett knew she could do better. Thanks to extensive planning, solid relationships with tradespeople and teamwork, her construction company (BGI Ltd.) completed the work in less than six weeks. The original contractor had estimated 17 to 22. Plus, she retained 87 per cent of sales during the construction period by continuing drive-thru operations.

MCCRISIS RESPONSE When Hurricane Igor hit eastern Newfoundland, thousands of people were without power. They were cold, and they were hungry. Using texting to coordinate employees and Facebook to communicate with customers, Bennett's team ensured that some of their restaurants remained open. Over the four days after Igor, with only four stores operational, the company achieved 130 per cent of total market sales.

