

# 2004 Gala *Awards* Dinner

Thursday, November 13th



Joseph L. Rotman School of Management  
University of Toronto

BMO  Financial Group

An initiative of: The Joseph L. Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto



Joseph L. Rotman School of Management  
University of Toronto

**Rotman**

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NATIONAL POST



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## Dean's Message

We are delighted to have you join us for this year's *Rotman Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Awards* to help celebrate more than a decade of Canadian entrepreneurial excellence.

Innovation is a crucial part of Canada's economic agenda, and thanks to women like those being honoured tonight, our entrepreneurial sector is thriving. According to the Prime Minister's Task Force on Women Entrepreneurs, there were 821,000 self-employed women in 2002, contributing more than \$18 billion to the Canadian economy.

In these turbulent times, sustainable advantage increasingly depends on our capacity – as individuals, organizations, and societies – for innovation, which ultimately depends on the knowledge, skills, and creativity of individuals like tonight's winners. Innovation also requires support from effective managers who drive company operations and strategies, and once again, tonight's honourees serve as role models for us all.

Entrepreneurs need our unrelenting support, because they are engaged in a creative process that avoids easy answers. They have learned to ignore the natural restrictions that demark the business world, and above all else, they have the courage to give unique ideas a try.

As a leading business school, we are excited to pay tribute to our nominees, applicants and winners, whose special blend of creativity, insight and courage have led them to innovate and implement business strategies that provide opportunity and value to their customers and their communities.

Every year, the selection of *Award* winners becomes increasingly difficult as we receive hundreds of nominations from dynamic and diverse entrepreneurs. Tonight, we present five *Awards*: Start-Up, Innovation, Impact on Local Economy, Export, and Lifetime Achievement.

All of us at the Rotman School are grateful to our presenting sponsor, BMO Financial Group, for co-founding these Awards in 1992, and for their dedicated support. Through this initiative, we are collectively encouraging the development of creative individuals everywhere.

Together, the Rotman School and all of our sponsors are proud to provide this forum to honour five special individuals who are helping Canada compete on the global stage.

Enjoy your evening, and congratulations to the 2004 *Award* winners.

### **Roger L. Martin**

Dean and Professor of Strategic Management  
Joseph L. Rotman School of Management



## BMO Financial Group

I take great pleasure in welcoming you to the *Rotman Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Awards* for 2004. On behalf of BMO Financial Group, I wish you a most enjoyable and inspirational evening.

We have supported these awards and this event right from the start, in recognition and celebration of a great new force to be reckoned with, not just in the marketplace but in the whole of society: the rapid and rightful coming of age of Canadian woman entrepreneurs. And we would not have missed it for the world.

### **Tony Comper,**

President & CEO, BMO Financial Group

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## NATIONAL POST

## NATIONAL POST **BUSINESS**

National Post, Canada's first genuinely national newspaper, welcomes you to this evening's celebration of Canada's most outstanding entrepreneurial women.

Founded in 1992, the *Rotman Canadian Women Entrepreneur of the Year Awards* were created to honour Canadian women who have turned their visions into business realities. And tonight, we continue the tradition. Awards will be presented to women whose ambition, creativity, innovation and risk-taking have led them to become industry and global leaders.

National Post salutes the vision, commitment and leadership exemplified by the finalists and distinguished recipients of the 2004 *Awards*. In recognizing their achievements in ever-expanding fields of business, these *Awards* are an inspiration to the growing number of women weighing the risks and rewards of entrepreneurship.

### **Robert Attala**

Publisher, National Post

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## **PROFIT**

PROFIT: Your Guide to Business Success is proud to be a part of tonight's celebration of the country's most distinguished women entrepreneurs.

Congratulations to all the nominees on your outstanding accomplishments. Your business triumphs are a reflection of your admirable passion, business acumen and tenacity. You are truly an inspiration and a testament to the fact that Canada is home to some of the world's most innovative and successful entrepreneurs.

### **Deborah Rosser**

Publisher, PROFIT: Your Guide to Business Success

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Chatelaine celebrates the passion, purpose and possibility of Canadian women, and so it is with particular pride that we sponsor the *Rotman Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Awards*. We applaud this year's nominees for their courage in following their dreams, their tenacity in overcoming all obstacles, and their razor-sharp business skills. With their success, we salute the achievements of all Canadian women in their work roles and wish them continued success in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

### **Kerry Mitchell**

Publisher, Chatelaine

## The Award by:

### TIFFANY & CO

The 18-karat brooch created by Tiffany & Co. is worn proudly by all recipients of the *Rotman Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Awards*. It was designed to embody the values of successful entrepreneurship, conveying energy and purpose, along with a sense of continuous renewal. It was created to be timeless, genuinely original, and to have national and historical resonance: the maple is an emblem of Canada; its seed is a natural symbol of growth and future potential; and the double wing shape suggests a career in full flight.

### Selection Process

Each year, nomination forms are distributed by all of the sponsors, past winners, and various business associations across Canada. We reach out to women in businesses of all shapes, sizes and industries. This year, more than 540 women were nominated, 77 of which followed the *Award* process through by submitting a completed application to our judging committee.

A team of national judges – themselves successful business women – had the difficult task of reviewing all of the applications and selecting the 2004 *Award* winners. Deloitte, led by Lynda Bowles, conducted a rigorous due diligence process including a review of financial statements, site visits and reference checks before confirming the 2004 winners.

### Organizers

#### Rotman

Steve Arenburg, Executive Director, Advancement, Events & Strategy and Jennifer Hildebrandt, Manager of Special Events.

#### Management of Applications and Judging:

Powerpoint Group logo

Patricia Pape, President

#### Material Design and Production:

ove

#### French Translation:

Mimi Staples, French Plus Inc.

#### Video Production:

Bob Fleck, Teamwork Communications

#### Awards Dinner and Ceremony Production:

duocom  
Creating Experiences Through Media

## 2004 Judges Panel

### Kate Bird

President, Career Essentials Inc. (ON)

### Doreen Braverman

President, International Flag & Banner Inc. (The Flag Shop) (BC)

### Linda Collier

President, Tri-Ad International Freight Forwarding Ltd. (ON)

### Meredith DeGroat

President, Totally Tropical Interiors Inc. (AB)

### Carol Denman

President, Atchison & Denman Court Reporting Services Limited (ON)

### Jocelyna Dubuc

Chief Executive Officer & Founder, Spa Eastman (QC)

### V. J. (Ginny) Dybenko

Vice President, Marketing & Partner Programs, Syndesis (ON)

### Jane Gowing

President, Gowing Contractors Ltd. (ON)

### Evelyn Jacks

President, The Knowledge Bureau (MB)

### Paula Jubinville

Consultant (ON)

### Rebecca MacDonald

Chair and CEO, Energy Savings Income Fund (ON)

### Barbara Mowat

President, Impact Communications Limited (BC)

### Becky Reuber

Associate Professor, Rotman School of Management (ON)

### Bonnie Struthers

Chairman, Normont Industrial Hardware Canada Ltd. (QC)

### Betty Thomas

President, Board Chair, Thomas FX Group Inc. (BC)

### Due Diligence Led By:

#### Lynda Bowles

Partner, Deloitte

## Past Winners

Debra Boyle, Pro Organics Marketing Inc.	2003	Jocelyna Dubuc, Spa Eastman	1997
Jane Gowing, Gowing Contractors Ltd.	2003	Evelyn Jacks, The Knowledge Bureau	1997
Lisa Olfman & Joy Rosen, Portfolio Entertainment Inc.	2003	Lee McDonald, Southmedic Inc.	1997
Nora McAleer, The Bridal Centre	2003	Valerie Hussey & Ricky Englander, Kids Can Press Ltd.	1997
Doris Tan, International Beauty Products	2003	Jo-Anne Schurman, The Loyalist Country Inn	1997
		Nancy Smith, NextMedia Company Limited	1997
Marianne Bertrand, Mutluks Inc	2002		
Kate Bird, Career Essentials Inc.	2002	Debi DeBelser, NWP Industries Inc.	1996
Jackie Kevill, Loony Lizard Inc.	2002	Louise Guay, My Virtual Model Inc.	1996
Rebecca MacDonald, Energy Savings Income Fund	2002	Diana Joseph, Wen-Di Interiors Ltd.	1996
Kathryn From & Shery Leeder, Bravado Designs Inc.	2002	Bev McMaster, We Care Health Services	1996
		Jane Somerville, Somerville House Books Limited	1996
Doreen Braverman, International Flag & Banner Inc. (The Flag Shop)	2001	Sylvia Vogel, Canderm Pharmacal Ltd.	1996
Linda Knight, CarePartners	2001		
Rosemary Marr, Transera Group of Companies	2001	Nancy Adamo, Hockley Valley Resort	1995
Kim McArthur, McArthur & Company Publishing Ltd.	2001	Meredith DeGroat, Totally Tropical Interiors Inc.	1995
Jody Steinhauer, The Bargains Group	2001	Virginia Garossino, Superior Ventures Group Inc.	1995
		Paula Lishman, Paula Lishman Ltd.	1995
Linda Bulter, Kidzpace Interacting Inc.	2000	Denise Meehan, Licks Ice Cream & Burger Shops	1995
Ann Kaplan, Medicard Finance Inc.	2000		
Gloria Parsons, Chancellor Park Inc.	2000	Margaret Armour, Aerobics First Services Limited	1994
Jane Tattersall, Tattersall Casablanca	2000	Moya Cahill, MNC Group Inc.	1994
Dianne Waterhouse, Round Top Window Products Inc.	2000	Linda Lundstrom, Linda Lundstrom	1994
		Rhona & Robyn MacKay, MacKay's Cochrane Ice Cream Ltd.	1994
Suzy Bernard, Zuritt Corporation Ltée et Moteur du Cuivre inc. et Farrimac inc.	1999	Jane Martin, Vas-Cath Inc.	1994
Elaine Cowan, Anokiwin Training Institute Inc.	1999		
Rossana DiZio Magnotta, Magnotta Winery	1999	Linda Collier, Tri-Ad International Freight Forwarding Ltd.	1993
Edith Jakobs, I.B.F. Canada	1999	Carol Denman, Atchison & Denman Court Reporting Services Limited	1993
Nancy Knowlton, SMART Technologies	1999	Cora Etter, Comac Holdings Limited	1993
Bonnie Struthers, Normont Industrial Hardware Canada Ltd.	1999	Lorraine Lush, Newfoundland Career Academy	1993
		Elaine Minacs, Minacs Worldwide Inc.	1993
Andrée Beaulieu-Green, ICARI Inc.	1998	Barbara Mowat, Impact Communications Limited	1993
Marguerite Hale, Morrison Lamothe Inc.	1998	Grace White, CanJam Trading Ltd.	1993
Wendy Derrick & Joanne McLean, Fernhill School of Mississauga, Inc.	1998		
Julia Levy, QLT Phototherapeutics Inc.	1998	Sally Fourmy, Sally Fourmy and Associates	1992
Molly Mak, Onward Computer Systems	1998	Neena Kanwar, KMH Cardiology Centres	1992
Betty Thomas, Thomas FX Group Inc.	1998	Emmie Wong Leung, International Paper Industries Inc.	1992

## We Applaud All of Our 2004 Applicants

### **Suzanne Amos**

Amos Pewterers  
Mohone Bay (NS)

### **Susan Jane Anstey**

Corinthian Publishing Co.  
Aurora (ON)

### **Janeen Balenovic**

Artists Emporium  
Winnipeg (MB)

### **Danielle Bélec**

Second Wind Pilate Plus  
Port Credit (ON)

### **Sharon Bell**

Checkers Entertainment Service  
Cameron (ON)

### **Monica Borg**

ITN Transborder Services  
Mississauga (ON)

### **Lori Brazier**

Catalyst Consulting  
Toronto (ON)

### **Eveline Charles**

Eveline Charles Spa  
Edmonton (AB)

### **Rosaleen Citron**

WhiteHat Inc.  
Burlington (ON)

### **Jane-Michele Clark**

The Q Group  
Toronto (ON)

### **Jill Clements-Baartman**

Talking Language and  
Communications Inc.  
Whitby (ON)

### **Susanne Courtney**

Courtney Rainey Group Inc.  
Toronto (ON)

### **Tiziana D'Angelo**

Messy Hands Inc.  
Richmond Hill (ON)

### **Janet Dattels Ortved**

Emblem  
Toronto (ON)

### **Sally Daub**

ViXS Systems Inc.  
Toronto (ON)

### **Connie Deckert**

Motivair Canada Ltd.  
Elmira (ON)

### **Marie Delorme**

Imagination Cards Inc.  
Calgary (AB)

### **Bonnie Derry**

Community Info-tel Directories  
Vernon (BC)

### **Julie Di Lorenzo**

Diamente Development Corp  
Toronto (ON)

### **Debra Donovan**

Scotia Slate Products Limited  
Rawdon (NS)

### **Andrée Falardeau**

Canus Goat's Milk Skin  
Care Products  
Ville St. Laurent (QC)

### **Shelley Elizabeth Fleckenstein**

Kings Physiotherapy Clinic Limited  
New Minas (NS)

### **Lenora Gates Orange**

National Retail Group &  
Ravenstor Investments  
West Vancouver (BC)

### **Kirsten Gauthier**

The Production Kitchen Inc.  
Toronto (ON)

## We Applaud All of Our 2004 Applicants

### **Christiane Germain**

Le Groupe Germain  
Quebec (QC)

### **Carole Gilman**

Seracon Products Ltd.  
Montreal (QC)

### **Ineke Graham**

Studio 21, Fine Art  
Halifax (NS)

### **Elizabeth Hall Findlay**

Banff Plastic Surgery  
Banff (AB)

### **Karen Hastie**

AKFIT Consultants Inc.  
Sudbury (ON)

### **Linda Hipp**

Hyp Golf Ltd.  
Richmond (BC)

### **Audrey Hudson**

Hudson Oddities  
Richibouctou-Village (NB)

### **Manju Jain**

Colled Com Credit Inc.  
Toronto (ON)

### **Katherine Jones**

Comprehensive Care  
International Inc.  
Toronto (ON)

### **Georgia Kalavrouziotis**

The Forna Grill, Casino Billards  
and The Billiard Connection  
Sydney (NS)

### **Dianne Kelderman**

Atlantic CED Network  
Teuro (NS)

### **Shari Lindsay**

Pacific Spatial Systems Ltd.  
Nanaimo (BC)

### **Belinda Lucas**

DTI Diversified Transportation Inc.  
New Hamburg (ON)

### **Beth Mairs**

Wild Women Expeditions  
Worthington (ON)

### **Karin Piett and Margaret Ramsdale**

Omega Frontline Apparel  
Vancouver (BC)

### **Alison and Hannah McIver**

Agribiotics Inc.  
Cambridge (ON)

### **Kirstie McLellan Day**

Pyramid Productions Inc.  
Calgary (AB)

### **Jennifer McNeill**

Ciphersoft Inc.  
Calgary (AB)

### **Gaye Moffett**

GEM Health Care Services Inc.  
Ottawa (ON)

### **Brenda Mortimer**

Central Plastic Sales  
Cambridge (ON)

### **Cybele Negris**

Webnames CA  
Vancouver (BC)

### **Susan Niczowski**

Summer Fresh Salads Inc.  
Woodbridge (ON)

### **Monica Noren**

BPC Business Pro Computer  
Products Ltd.  
Vancouver (BC)

### **Carole Ogus**

Carole's Cheesecake Company Ltd  
Toronto (ON)

## We Applaud All of Our 2004 Applicants

### **Gloria Palcich**

Optionelle  
London (ON)

### **Sheena Pennie**

Delta Media Inc.  
Ottawa (ON)

### **Renah Persofsky**

Dexit  
Toronto (ON)

### **Karen Pyra**

Pyra Management  
Consulting Services  
Mount Uniacke (NS)

### **Patricia Quinn**

Creative Options Inc.  
Waterloo (ON)

### **Tracy Quinton**

Quinton Internation Inc. /  
Quinton Group  
London (ON)

### **Cynthia Richards**

Events Spectrum Inc.  
Toronto (ON)

### **Magdalena Romanska**

Adverdum Translation  
Nuns' Island (QC)

### **Gretha Rose**

Cellar Door Productions  
Charlottetown (PEI)

### **Dufflet Rosenberg**

Dufflet Pastries  
Toronto (ON)

### **Carrie Rowan**

Absolute Recruitment Inc.  
Mississauga (ON)

### **Linda Schuyler**

Epitome Pictures Inc.  
Toronto (ON)

### **Carole Seable**

Fairmont Hot Springs Resort  
Fairmont Hot Springs (BC)

### **Andrea Sharp**

Cozpro Group  
Mississauga (ON)

### **Carol Slatt**

Lorac Wine Inc.  
Toronto (ON)

### **Elen Steinberg**

SPP Marketing Services Inc.  
Toronto (ON)

### **Michelle Tessaro**

Retail Food Brands Inc.  
Mississauga (ON)

### **Ginette Tremblay**

Editions L'Artichaut  
Rimouski (QC)

### **Cora Trsouflidou**

Franchise Cora inc.  
Boisbriand (QC)

### **Angela Tu**

At Fortune Holdings Inc.  
Aldergrove (BC)

### **Daisy Wai**

AD2000 and Beyond Advertising Inc.  
Richmond Hill (ON)

### **Nancy Wilde**

Wilde Imagination Sign & Design  
Vernon (BC)

### **Anita Wolfe**

Environment for Change  
Victoria (BC)

### **Michelle Yates**

MAD Creations, Inc.  
Toronto (ON)



## 2004 Start-Up Award

**Patti Falus, President, Barter Network Limited,  
Toronto, Ontario**

Patti Falus's entrepreneurial journey started early. While still barely in her teens and working part-time at a video rental store in Montreal, she noticed a gap in the services being offered and started a video duplication service. This 'side business' cured the entrepreneurial teen's travel bug, allowing for travel throughout the Americas and abroad. At 18, Patti's 'real education' began when she started apprenticing with her uncle Yves in his home décor import business. Yves saw promise in his niece and passed on his passion for sales and the 'thrill of the close'. Patti was a natural.

In search of larger markets and better business opportunities, Patti set out for Toronto. At 22, she spent her life savings on a mid-town condominium – doubling her money in ten months and firmly entrenching her passion for real estate. She would go on to repeat this popular 'renovate & resell' strategy through nine subsequent properties over the next 15 years.

In 1990 Patti married and had her first child, Zachary, two years later. The difficulties of shopping with an infant soon prompted her next venture: The Wholesale Baby Connection. The Connection was a children's clothing business with a twist: through pre-planned parties, new moms could socialize and shop with their friends in the comfort of their own home. The concept was very well received, and was even featured on Citytv's *Cityline* program.

Unfortunately, what started The Baby Connection also ended it: Patti could no longer continue organizing home parties due to her high-risk pregnancy with her next child, Madison, who was born in 1994. Left with inventory to move, a cousin suggested liquidation through a barter exchange. As she closed the door on her business, a new window opened: The Barter Business Exchange. Patti became so enamoured with the trade business that she joined BBE as an account manager in 1995. Over the next five years, her reputation grew as one of the top brokers in this multi-billion dollar (male-dominated) industry.

In 1999, BBE was bought out by the Seattle-based IBC (International Barter Corp), an Internet-based business-to-business solution for the barter industry. A year later, IBC became Ubarter.com, which was subsequently taken over by Shopnow.com. The member-clients became less than enchanted with the company's 'multiple personality disorder', while Patti's focus on personal contact and customer relations seemed to have gone out the window.

When Patti echoed her client's concerns, she was promptly shown the door. But once again a closed door presented an open window: two months later, Barter Network Limited was born.

After four years, Barter Network Ltd. (BNL) has far surpassed expectations. With over 1,800 members (after the recent purchase of Trans-America Trade Exchange in Ottawa/Montreal); an annual projected membership growth of 30 per cent; debt-free revenues in the millions; and annual trade passing \$50 million, Patti's barter exchange is head and shoulders above any other Canadian attempt ever made. Arguably, BNL sits as the third largest exchange in North America by revenue and the largest by per capita market share as it matures to a truly national concern. BNL holds dozens of reciprocal agreements with exchanges worldwide, allowing barter-active companies to benefit from the Canadian market.

This year, BNL won the Consumer's Choice Award as 'Toronto's best barter exchange', and recently, Patti was elected to the board of the National Association of Trade Exchanges, a governing body that promotes ethical trading across North America. Obviously, the respect of her peers and customers is something Patti doesn't have to barter for.

### **Presented by: Deloitte.**

Congratulations. Patti's ability to continually reinvent her business strategies, seek growth opportunities and her strong values have grown The Barter Network to unexpected heights in only four short years. With the Barter Network, she has created an environment where great people and products come together to do great work.

We applaud Patti and all of tonight's *Award* winners for chasing their dreams, bringing strength and vitality to Canada's economy and for being role models for us all.

**Lynda Bowles**  
Partner, Deloitte



## 2004 Innovation Award

**Joanne Papari-Doulaverakis, President,  
Biochem Environmental Solutions,  
Concord, Ontario**

The founder of Canada's only manufacturer and servicer of washroom hygiene products in the local and international market, Joanne Papari's story is one of dedication, determination, and success.

Born and raised in Greece, Joanne moved to Canada in 1977 to study Chemical Engineering at the University of Windsor. After graduating, she was hired by Rochester Midland as a chemical sales representative, where she quickly became the top salesperson in North America. After breaking into a predominantly male industry, Joanne rose within the company, and in 1991 was the top manager in Canada.

Convinced that a niche existed within the market for washroom products that both enhance the environment and reduce the risk of contamination, Joanne started Biochem Environmental Solutions ('Biochem') in 1996 in an effort to fill this demand. Since that time, Biochem has grown to become a major market force, with approximately 30 per cent of the Canadian washroom hygiene market, which is estimated to be worth between \$50 and \$100 million. In order to ensure the continued success of her company, Joanne works closely with her team and customers to discern market needs and manage her manufacturing capabilities, giving Biochem an outstanding reputation for quality products and unparalleled service in the industry. Today, Joanne's company holds several patents and has a team of engineers, chemists and technologists continually developing customized products.

Believing that in business, as in life, success depends on the people you surround yourself with, Joanne hires and retains key staff to complement her abilities and is committed to employee development, which in turn has fostered strong loyalty. Customers and staff describe Joanne as a person with a clear vision and the courage to try to do what others think is impossible.

Despite the demands of a growing business, Joanne always makes time for her family and community. She counts raising two children among her greatest accomplishments, and she and her company actively raise money for many charities including the Ronald McDonald Children's Charities of Canada. Joanne is also a business partner in The Learning Partnership – an organization that prepares children for the business world.

Today's Biochem has expanded to sell specialty chemicals and automatic washroom fixtures that enhance the safety and cleanliness of public washrooms, reducing the risk of bacteria and contamination. Biochem is the only company worldwide that manufactures and offers matching fragrances for all of its commercial and industrial washroom products. Though initially, Biochem offered only four products with multiple fragrances to match customer's preferences, the company responded to growing demand and added odour-counteractants for garbage compactors to its product list. Later, recognizing the need to address concerns about cross-contamination in washrooms, Biochem introduced waterless hand sanitizers, automatic faucets, automatic flush valves and soap dispensers. Since its inception, and largely due to its innovative staff, Biochem has enjoyed double digit growth year after year and expects to maintain that growth in the future.

### Presented by:



Joseph L. Rotman School of Management  
University of Toronto

On behalf of everyone at the Rotman School, I would like to extend our heartiest congratulations to Joanne Papari-Doulaverakis. We are particularly proud to sponsor the Innovation Award as we firmly believe that innovation is the key to prosperity in the modern economy.

Joanne continually shapes and designs her company's products and future. Exhilarated, not daunted by challenges, she has forged ahead in a difficult and competitive industry by meeting and exceeding her customer's expectations.

Congratulations Joanne, and to all of our winners. Your unique and fabulous success stories inspire us all.

### Roger L. Martin

Dean, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto



# 2004 Impact on Local Economy Award

**Marnie Walker, Founder, Student Express Limited,  
Toronto, Ontario**

Marnie Walker is a York University MBA (Dean's List) graduate who started out in small-town Ontario, developed her business savvy in the corporate world, and went on to establish and build a multi-million-dollar school bus company. Her corporate philosophy, strategic focus and leadership have taken Student Express Limited from a start-up company in 1990 (with eight buses, nine employees and revenues of \$240,000) to an industry leader in 2004 with revenues of over \$10 million, 295 employees and a fleet of 250 buses.

Student Express provides safe and caring transportation for special-needs individuals attending schools, special programs, camps and other organizations in the Greater Toronto Area. Marnie initially focused on these customers because she saw other companies neglecting this niche. Nobody else wanted to transport these people because they were "too difficult". She had found her competitive edge.

Transporting 'special people' makes a significant contribution to the community. These individuals – most of whom have no other means of transportation – count on the Student Express team to transport them safely and with dignity. Having had to use canes and crutches for eight years as the result of a serious illness she faced in her teens and twenties, Walker understands first-hand that people with special needs require respect and consideration as much as additional assistance.

Starting up Student Express and financing its growth have been a challenge. Divorced, with no support from her family, and no capital to speak of, Marnie initially used her Visa card and a bank loan to finance her overhead and fleet. By keeping her corporate job for the first five years, she was able to use her salary and asset lenders to help finance the company's future growth. Student Express made money in its first year, and continues to generate better returns than its large public competitors.

Marnie's approach to growth and financing has always been conservative – her first priority being maintaining the company's reputation with existing customers. The focus is on profitable revenue growth, cost control and cash flow. According to her, "if you watch these indices, the rest just happens."

Increasing insurance and fuel costs, school board budget cuts, as well as high driver turnover rates (the industry norm) have provided challenges along the way, but self-reliant Marnie always asks herself, "What do I have to do to get what I need?" To reduce her insurance rates, she produced a Driver Training Program. To lower driver turnover rates, she created a supportive environment for her drivers, where they would want to work and take pride in their jobs. They are even encouraged to keep the buses they drive near their homes to reduce wasted mileage and time.

The challenges she has faced personally have made Marnie even more determined to make a difference in other people's lives through her company and her personal involvement in organizations such as the Women President's Organization, advisory boards, speaking engagements and mentoring programs.

## Presented by:

**BMO  Financial Group**

When it comes to the Impact on Local Economy Award, our actions at BMO Financial Group speak louder than any words. We snapped up the category way back when these awards were still in the organizational stages, and we have kept it ever since.

This particular prize reflects our own deep commitment to the communities we serve, as well as our deep respect for the woman entrepreneur who makes that extra special effort to serve the public good.

**Tony Comper**

President & CEO, BMO Financial Group



## 2004 Export Award

**Sandra Wilson, Founder and President, Robeez Footwear Limited,  
Toronto, Ontario**

When Sandra Wilson was downsized out of her airline job in 1994, she welcomed the opportunity to spend more time with her 18-month old son, Robert, and try something she had always wanted to do: start her own business. In search of entrepreneurial inspiration, she needed to look no further than her son's tiny feet.

Sandra started Robeez Footwear in her basement, manufacturing brightly-coloured, soft-soled leather footwear that would protect her baby's feet, but allow him to feel the floor and gain his balance while he toddled about. With no background in the footwear business, she truly started from scratch – learning everything she could about leather, cutting, sewing, design, sales and distribution.

When Robeez made its public debut at the Vancouver Gift Show in 1994, the response was overwhelming, and Sandra left with 15 retail accounts. Throwing herself into production, she continued to handle almost all of the early work herself, turning her basement into Robeez headquarters. Since 1994, Robeez has experienced phenomenal growth: 2,922 per cent in the past five years alone, with over 60 per cent of sales outside of Canada, in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Japan, Singapore, Germany, France and Australia. Today, Sandra's unique designs are available in more than 60 styles and sold in over 4,000 stores worldwide.

Under Sandra's direction, the company goes to great lengths to maintain close connections with its customers, wherever they may be. Robeez has established regional offices and websites in the UK, Europe and Australia and employs local sales representatives around the world. A large percentage of the sales force are enthusiastic moms, who have personally experienced the Robeez combination of adorable designs and functional benefits.

As her company continues to expand, the 'Made in Canada' label is more than just a source of pride for Sandra – it's an important selling feature for her global customers. Today, the company's manufacturing, quality control, sales, marketing, packaging and shipping all take place in Burnaby, BC. With everything under one roof, decision making and information flow happens quickly, enabling Robeez to respond immediately to market demands.

Sandra's strong family values have helped shaped her company's work environment. 'Coffee with Sandra' brings together small groups of employees

once a week for an informal discussion about the business and workplace. The initiative's overwhelming popularity has demonstrated the importance of listening to feedback from the team. Customers are also encouraged to give feedback on anything from sales support to design ideas.

Sandra credits her success to values that her parents instilled in her at an early age: a strong work ethic, fiscal responsibility and perseverance. She has managed to grow a globally-successful business while remaining active in her community by managing her son's hockey team and serving as treasurer of his school's parent advisory committee. In 2003, Sandra established the Robeez Heart & Sole program, which donates much-needed children's footwear to non-profit societies and charities throughout the world.

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, Robeez has also been recognized by PROFIT magazine as one of Canada's 100 Fastest Growing Companies, ranking 19th in 2003 and 2004. Sandra's son and inspiration is now 11 years old, and is extremely proud to see his mother's creations on thousands of tiny feet.

### Presented by:



Women entrepreneurs represent one of the fastest-growing business segments in Canada, so it is not surprising that more women are reaching for the next big step in their business evolution – exporting. As EDC celebrates 60 years of encouraging and facilitating exporting for businesswomen and men across Canada with our global market expertise, trade financing and credit insurance services, we are proud to support this program and the talented Export Award winners who have emerged from it. Like her forerunners, this year's winner is proof positive that Canadians can compete with the best in the world.

**Gilles Ross**

Acting President, Export Development Canada



# 2004 Lifetime Achievement Award

**Suzanne Bernard Leclair, Founder, Transit Inc. Truck Bodies,  
Laval, Quebec**

Close your eyes, and picture the founder and president of Canada's leading truck-box manufacturer: odds are, he looks nothing like Suzanne Bernard Leclair. In 1978, Suzanne was the first woman ever to start up a manufacturing enterprise in Quebec when she founded Transit Inc. Truck Bodies, a designer and manufacturer of customer truck 'boxes' – the container part of a transport truck. Today, with 230 employees, Transit Inc. is Canada's leading manufacturer of truck bodies, selling over 26,000 units. Her products cover the gamut from emergency vehicles to transport trucks for frozen food, beverages, specialized truck bodies for municipalities and more.

Suzanne's early days were not without their struggles. In 1978, when her then-boss put his truck-box manufacturing company up for sale, Suzanne offered to buy it – but he wouldn't even discuss it with her. She decided to start up Transit Inc. on her own, but funding proved problematic: none of the banks would deal with her, so she had to mortgage her house and operate the business using her personal bank account.

Despite the hardships one year after starting up, 150 truck bodies had been produced, and the company had earned \$800,000. Suzanne realized that if she could significantly differentiate herself from her competitors, these numbers could grow exponentially. She chose to make Transit Inc. stand out by offering personalized after-sales service to her customers, which entails personally visiting each client after a vehicle is delivered, to ensure they are completely satisfied and to get their feedback.

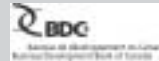
Unlike her competitors, her company also produces nearly all of the parts required to make its truck boxes, allowing for custom designs tailored to clients' needs. For instance, one client – an egg company – complained that its chickens were too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer. Suzanne gave them happy chickens year-round with a unique air-regulating system. That kind of service and ingenuity is why Transit Inc.'s revenues have continued to grow for 26 straight years.

While running her business, Suzanne has managed to raise two children and remain active in community initiatives, notably fundraising for St. Justine's Hospital, the Canadian Cancer Society and the Quebec Cystic Fibrosis Association. She is also a board member for several high profile organizations, including National Bank of Canada and National Trust. Amongst her many

honours, in 1984 she was named Business Woman of the Year by Quebec's Salon de la Femme; and in 1988 she received the Veuve Clicquot Award from Canadian Women in Business. In 1995, The Honourable Romeo Leblanc, Governor General of Canada, presented her with the National Award for Leadership.

Suzanne's entrepreneurial spirit and keen business sense have allowed her to become a true pioneer in Canadian business. In 1986 Suzanne took Transit public, only to buy back all of the shares in 1990. Not one to rest on her laurels, she continues to strive for innovation and global expansion, 26 years after starting her business: Transit Inc.'s products are sold all across Canada, and in the spring of 2005, Suzanne will travel to Italy to meet with potential suppliers whose products will allow her to further improve her products – which means more happy chickens, and more happy customers.

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The Business Development Bank of Canada is pleased to be associated again this year with the *Rotman Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Awards*. As a proud partner in the success of Canadian small and medium-sized business for 60 years, we recognize the contribution of women entrepreneurs as a driving force in Canada's economy, both as business owners and employers.

Through our sponsorship of the Lifetime Achievement Award, we pay tribute to women whose determination and ingenuity are an inspiration to us all. This is especially true of this year's recipient, Suzanne Bernard Leclair, founding president of Les Fourgons Transit Inc. We applaud Suzanne's outstanding achievements, remarkable success, and undeniable contribution. To this distinguished entrepreneur and to all of this evening's winners, our heartiest congratulations.

### Pat Ghany

Vice President & Area Manager, Mississauga,  
Business Development Bank of Canada