

# Small Business Awards



Emily, representing staff of Yoka Sushi accepts the New Small Business of the Year award from Andrea Jackson of Community Credit Union, award sponsor and Alex Stevenson, Chamber President. (Rees Photo)

## New Small Business of the Year

This award recognizes a Truro or Colchester business operating for more than one year and less than two years that has gained an expanding positive reputation. The business must have shown innovation and offer unique products or services that go the extra mile in the local marketplace.

YOKA Japanese and Thai owned by Yongyong Huang & Daohuang Cheng, opened in the heart of downtown Truro last year. The new business already has a compliment of 11 staff.

The upscale restaurant is focused on healthy, delicious and excellent food; and introduced an All YOU CAN EAT Japanese & Thai style eating environment to Colchester County. Upon opening they bought all brand new equipment, furni-

ture and other products to run the business on the lower level of Walker Lofts.

The owners say the key to be successful is based on the following four points: Satisfied customers will mean repeat business, a bright welcoming location, reasonably priced delicious food and experienced, friendly staff.

In an effort to provide dining patrons with new tastes in Japanese cuisine, Yoka works on an ongoing basis to improve existing cuisine and develop new menu items that appeal to today's increasing number of consumers who insist on consistently high-quality, delicious Japanese fare with authentic "old country" flavour. They are also already planning an expansion into Pictou County.



Kirk Saint of Tobias Portraiture accepts the Small Business Innovation Award from Jaime Blaauwendraat representing RBC, award sponsor and Alex Stevenson, Chamber President. (Rees Photo)

## Innovation Award

The Small Business Innovation award recognizes a Truro or Colchester County entrepreneur who has been in business for more than five years, who is continually modifying to demonstrate innovative leadership through the use of technology, development of new or value-added products and services and improved productivity. Those nominated for this award portray community spirit and generosity, consistently supporting community causes while growing the economy.

Since 1994 Kirk Saint has been using his photographic skills to capture special moments for all ages. He has three distinct brands under the Tobias Portraiture label: Unique Images, Edgy Sports and Santa's Workshoppe. For more than two decades he has continually diversified his business by keeping up with changing trends to meet the niche demands of clients. He attends workshops and conferences in both Canada and US

to learn new skills that translate into artistic treasures for clients.

As digital photography evolved the industry became flooded with new entrants. It wasn't enough to offer traditional or contemporary style Portraiture. He began studying with Hollywood and national advertising campaign photographers learning to create fantasy style images. He has also experimented with printing options from traditional to canvas, metal, acrylic and more.

With the studio operating on Inglis Street in Truro, Kirk is attracting clients from outside areas to this region for his unique brand of photography; "with endless creative possibilities for every image created," he says.

He gives back to the community by supporting year-book programs at local schools, offering sponsorships and in-kind or product donations to many local fundraisers.



Ben Brush & Amy Allain, representing My Home Apparel, accept the Exporter of the Year award from David Copus of NSBI, award sponsor. (Rees Photo)

## Exporter of the Year

The Exporter of the Year award recognizes a Truro or Colchester County business that has demonstrated excellence in exporting outside Nova Scotia, and has achieved noticeable growth as a result of entering expanded markets, while creating employment, contributing to the local economy.

Since opening in August 2015, My HOME Apparel has experienced exponential growth. A celebration of home, they handprint all their Canadian made t-shirts, in their own screen printing facility, and wholesale and retail across Canada. Five per cent of the business's profits are donated to help end homelessness in Canada.

Currently they have a retail store in Truro and a new store opening in Moncton within a month. They currently wholesale to more than 100 stores across Canada with lofty plans

to expand further in the next 12 months.

Clothing is a very competitive industry but they have set themselves apart by wrapping each package they sell like a care package from 'HOME' and send every order with a handwritten note, and a maple candy. They have created an innovative approach that is personal and a brand that is built on comfort, community and connection.

My Home Apparel is a socially responsible company working to end homelessness in Canada. They have given back over \$20,000 in 2 years and we are actively giving back every month. We have initiated local projects supporting the homeless community and those in need. Our whole mission is to help give all Canadians home, and this is what fuels the business every single day.

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