

# ACCESS

## SASKATCHEWAN

January - March 2002

### And the Winner Is...

by Diane Abernethy

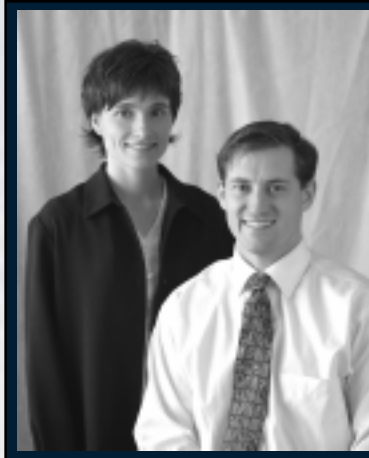
The 2001 Ernst and Young award for Emerging Entrepreneurs in the Prairie Region goes to...Daniel and Garnette Weber, founders of Saskatoon-based **Interactive Tracking Systems Inc. (Itracks)!**

“Receiving this award means much more to us than recognition by our peers,” says Garnette, executive vice president of finance. “It commends the efforts of everyone at Itracks. It is through their dedication that we’ve been so successful. This award is a compliment to them.”

In 1998 the Weber’s incorporated Itracks, set up offices in Saskatoon and hired their first employee. They haven’t looked back since. Over the years it has grown from a two-person operation into a company with 46 employees, and over 80 per cent of its sales come from the export of its services.

Itracks develops and offers customized Internet survey and on-line focus group services to clients across Canada and

internationally. By focusing on research and development of innovative Web-based products, they were able to meet the needs of the marketing industry. Many of Itracks clients are international market research firms that service many of the world’s Fortune 500 companies. Companies such as IPSOS-Reid in Canada and AC Nielson in the U.S. regularly use Itracks technology on behalf of clients like Kodak, Lucas Films and Sony.



Garnette and Dan Weber, co-founders of Interactive Tracking Systems Inc.

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) is proud to play a small part in the success of Itracks. Through the First Jobs in Science and Technology Program and International Trade Personnel Program, WD provided assistance for Itracks to hire employees needed to expand its business.

WD congratulates Itracks on receiving the Emerging Entrepreneur award and looks forward to its continued success.✻

# CommunityNet Gets Two Thumbs Up!

by Diane Abernethy

**CommunityNet** is less than a year old, but its benefits are already making a difference across Saskatchewan. By October 2001, over 200 facilities had been connected to the high-speed network, most of them schools. And perhaps this is where CommunityNet has already made its biggest impact.

“Having a class access the Internet at the same time used to mean waiting – the connection speed couldn’t handle the congestion of trying to load multiple pages at once,” says James Wahl a Grade 7 teacher at St. Gabriel School in Regina. “Now the process of using the Internet with students is seamless. There is less frustration on the part of the student, and teachers don’t have to worry about having to fill gaps when the system doesn’t work or half the kids can’t access what they need.”

Saskatchewan’s schools are not the only ones to benefit. CommunityNet is a province-wide initiative that is extending a high-speed network and Internet access to health facilities and government offices across Saskatchewan, in addition to schools. Once connected these facilities will see benefits ranging from

improved access to specialized services and follow-up health care for people in rural regions, to the development of on-line courses and the expansion of distance education. This is all possible thanks to an Internet connection that can be up to 100 times faster than traditional dial-up connections.

Western Economic Diversification Canada contributed \$5 million towards the first phase of the project, enabling the connection of 216 schools, including First Nations schools.

Western Economic Diversification Canada contributed \$5 million towards the first phase of the project, enabling the connection of 216 schools, including First Nations schools. Overall, phase one will see the creation of new infrastructure to bring high-speed Internet to the schools, and health centres in 150 communities. When the project is completed in three years, 800 schools,

310 health care facilities and 256 government offices will have been connected in 366 communities.

CommunityNet’s other partners are the Government of Saskatchewan, SaskTel and the Saskatchewan Communications Network.

For more information on CommunityNet, please visit [www.communitynet.ca](http://www.communitynet.ca) ♦

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## Made in Saskatchewan – and Proud of it!

by Diane Abernethy

We've all heard of Echinacea, St. John's Wort and other natural health remedies – some of us swear by them and others wonder if they really work. But you probably never imagined that they are a part of a natural health product industry that is worth over \$75 billion U.S. annually worldwide, and growing. Some of that growth is being seen in Saskatchewan thanks to companies such as **Nutravim Nutraceuticals Ltd.** in Moose Jaw.

Estevan native and Nutravim President Brad Grimes worked for a pharmaceutical company in Toronto for 14 years. During that time he watched growth skyrocket in the nutraceutical sector of the natural health product industry. (Nutraceuticals are defined as a product that has been isolated or purified from plants and is generally sold in medicinal forms not usually associated with food.) As the demand for processing facilities increased, Grimes saw his opportunity and founded the company.

In January 2001, Nutravim started commercially processing and packaging natural health products such as Echinacea for retail and distribution companies in Canada and the United States. The exciting news is that it is the only facility of its kind in Western Canada.

“Where better to locate such a facility than in the heart of Canada’s crop growing region and along the TransCanada Highway,” says Grimes of his decision to locate the company in Moose Jaw. “Saskatchewan grows some of the best natural health crops in the world and is known for having a natural healthy environment. When combined with the many other



Nutravim production employees monitoring the packaging process.

advantages our province has to offer, you can be sure that Saskatchewan will continue to excel in this industry.”

Nutravim received assistance from **South Central Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC)**. The CFDC is involved with the **Industrial Development Corporation** set up by the City of Moose Jaw with \$200,000 in funding from Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) to provide economic development incentives to industries involved in the manufacturing or processing of products for sale. This program assisted with the purchase of needed equipment and start-up costs. WD also provides funding to the 13 CFDCs in Saskatchewan. ♣

# Finding Information Has Never Been This Easy

by Diane Abernethy

The **Canada-Saskatchewan Business Service Centre (CSBSC)** in Saskatoon brought new meaning to the phrase “on-line help” when it recently rolled out its new Web site feature, “*Talk To Us*.” Saskatchewan residents now have another resource literally at their fingertips when it comes to business information.

This innovative service allows clients to speak directly with a Business Service Centre information officer over the phone as information is sent directly onto their computer screen.

“It’s as close as we’re going to get to being able to collaborate with a client without actually sitting across a desk from them,” says Diana Matsuda, CSBSC manager. “The only requirement on the part of the client is the ability to be on-line and use the phone at the same time.”

*Talk To Us* is accessed through the CSBSC Web site — [www.cbsc.org/sask](http://www.cbsc.org/sask). After a client provides their phone number and Internet connection settings, such as modem speed and browser, an officer calls and the session begins. The officer can ‘push’ information requested, whether it’s a link to another Web site or a document on financial planning, onto the client’s screen and discuss it — they will literally be on the same page.

*Talk To Us* provides people in rural Saskatchewan with easier access to the wealth of business information and guidance provided by CSBSC. “For many, accessing CSBSC’s information meant long drives and added expenses,” says Matsuda. “Making a trip into Saskatoon was not an option. Now, through *Talk to Us*, these people will be able to receive the same service as a walk-in client. For other clients, it’s a new way of continuing to deliver the personal service they value and providing even faster access to the information they need.”

The Canada-Saskatchewan Business Service Centre is a joint initiative of Western Economic Diversification Canada and Saskatchewan Economic and Co-operative Development, and a member of the Canada Business Service Network. It offers entrepreneurs information on starting a business, developing a business plan, marketing strategies, financing and regulatory matters.

*Talk To Us* is a part of the Government of Canada’s Government On-line Initiative and the Saskatchewan centre won’t be the only one to benefit. The service was piloted at centres in four provinces and is on-line in Manitoba. ♣

