



**WISCONSIN
ENTREPRENEURS' NETWORK**

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Unique Statewide Awards Program to recognize job-creating powerhouses in Wisconsin

Madison, Wis. — Celebrating entrepreneurs and communicating their value to the community is an important aspect of creating an environment that supports entrepreneurship. To that end, the Wisconsin Entrepreneurs' Network (WEN), with support from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce (Commerce) and the Division of Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (DEED) at the University of Wisconsin-Extension is excited to announce the launch of *Wisconsin Companies to Watch*.

Companies to Watch (CTW) is a distinctive awards program developed by the Edward Lowe Foundation to honor second-stage companies that demonstrate high performance in the marketplace, exhibit innovative products, services or processes, or otherwise make their company “worth watching.”

The foundation recognizes that many second-stage companies fly under the radar of typical awards programs. *Companies to Watch* is specifically designed to seek out businesses from a wide range of industries representing all areas of the state, not just those in major metropolitan areas. In addition to an evaluation on past growth and projected success, applicant companies are judged according to their special strengths. These strengths revolve around innovative products and business practices, special use of technology, work within the community and more.

To be considered, companies may be nominated by an outside source or they may simply submit an application on their own. There are a number of reasons to apply for *CTW*, including regional and statewide recognition, media coverage, high-level networking at the awards event, and the opportunity to tell the company story to thousands of people. WEN and Commerce have been host to another Edward Lowe Foundation program since 2005. PeerSpectives, a peer learning roundtable group for entrepreneurs currently has eight tables around Wisconsin, facilitated by the SBDC network. *CTW* award winners will be invited to join a peer learning group that gives them the opportunity to tap into the collective wisdom of the group of winners.

“The Edward Lowe Foundation has a strong track record establishing the need to help entrepreneurs grow their businesses,” said Department of Commerce Secretary Richard J. Leinenkugel. “I’m confident that the second-stage businesses that win the opportunity to join this program will obtain valuable assistance to continue their development.”

WEN and SBDC state director Gayle Kugler heard about the program from fellow SBDC

state directors in neighboring Michigan and Indiana. In addition to those states, CTW also operates in Colorado, Arizona and North Carolina. It is recognized that second-stage companies are the ones that create innovation in American business, but according to research by the Edward Lowe Foundation, they also catalyze job growth.

DEED's executive director, Kim Kindschi explains, "Building an entrepreneurial community involves creating a supportive culture. We look forward to bringing the spotlight to these companies and their innovative approach to business." DEED is host to the statewide WEN and SBDC programs.

Kugler has met with many state and regional economic development providers in preparation for this launch. "The more partners we have participating, the stronger our pool of candidates," she said. Cathy Sullivan, DEED program coordinator, who recently attended the annual awards banquet honoring the Indiana winners, commented that "the annual award program gives high-class recognition and visibility to a deserving group of companies. It allows winners to leverage exposure into new opportunities and boosts credibility and recognition."

For further information or to explore the possibility of becoming a *CTW* nominee, sponsor or judge, visit www.Wisconsin.CompaniesToWatch.org or contact Cathy Sullivan at wisconsinctw@lowe.org

2010 Wisconsin Companies To Watch awardees and their guests will be invited to a gala celebration in their honor on April 13, 2010 at Monona Terrace in Madison.

About WEN: The Wisconsin Entrepreneurs' Network (WEN) was established in June 2005 as a joint venture between the Wisconsin Department of Commerce and the University of Wisconsin-Extension's Entrepreneurship and Economic Development Division (DEED). WEN and its partners strive to provide seamless access to the statewide network of entrepreneurial resources and expertise to create new ventures. WEN partners help grow existing businesses and move forward high-potential entrepreneurs to enable Wisconsin to be competitive in a global economic environment. For more information, visit www.wenportal.org

About the Edward Lowe Foundation: Established in 1985, the Edward Lowe Foundation is a nonprofit organization that supports entrepreneurship through research, recognition and educational programs, which are delivered through entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs). The foundation focuses on second-stage companies — those that have moved beyond the startup phase and seek significant, steady growth. For more information, visit www.edwardlowe.org

About the Wisconsin Companies to Watch Nominating Process:

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Application Requirements To be considered, companies may be nominated by an outside source or they may simply submit an application on their own. All applications must be completed online. No paper applications will be accepted. Applicants must meet certain minimum qualifications as a second-stage company (for specific eligibility requirements, please see each [program's Web site](#)). In general, a company must:

- Be privately held (not publicly traded and not a subsidiary or division of another company).
- Be a commercial enterprise, not a nonprofit.
- Be past the startup stage.
- Be facing issues of growth, not survival.
- Employ 6 to 99 full-time equivalent employees, including the owner.
- Have between \$750,000 and \$50 million in annual revenue or working capital in place from investors or grants.
- Be headquartered in Wisconsin.
- Demonstrate the intent and capacity to grow based on evidence such as:
 - Employee or sales growth.
 - Exceptional entrepreneurial leadership.
 - Sustainable competitive advantage.
 - Other notable factors that showcase the company's success and special strengths.

Nominations Anyone may nominate a company, but nominations typically come from service providers (accountants, bankers, attorneys, public relations professionals and others); economic development offices; trade, business and community associations; the media; and universities. Nominators submit an online form, and nominees are automatically sent an e-mail with instructions to complete an application form. Only online nominations will be considered. There are many reasons to nominate a company, including encouragement and support of client successes, introduction to a prospective client, business development or a desire to showcase specific industries or companies.

Judging Process Award recipients are selected by a panel of judges comprised of business, economic development and community leaders.