

**THE HALIFAX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE** is pleased to present this year's Halifax Business Award finalists. Now in our 19th year, and sponsored by RBC, this event allows us to showcase Halifax's best and brightest business leaders and entrepreneurs. Businesses and individuals are judged by a panel spearheaded by Gina Gale, Senior Vice-President with BDC. We have dedicated this issue to profiling the incredible individuals who have made it to the finalist stage. These pages don't do their hard work justice, but they do provide a sample of who these individuals are. We hope you enjoy getting to know this year's finalists and book Thursday, Jan. 24 to celebrate with us at the 2019 Halifax Business Awards gala.

To view the full interviews with this year's nominees, please visit our website: [www.halifaxchamber.com](http://www.halifaxchamber.com)



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Thank you to The Exchange on Hollis  
for hosting the 2019 finalists  
for this year's photo shoot.

Photos by Paul Darrow





 HALIFAX **BUSINESS AWARDS** 2019



# NEW BUSINESS of the year finalists



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## New Business of the year finalists

L-R: *Jake Moore, Co-Founder and CEO, Nanuk Technologies, Graham Collins, President, Compass Distillers, Lisa Brow, Co-Owner, Tart and Soul Café, Mike Gillespie, Partner & Co-Founder, New Scotland Brewing Co.*  
*Missing: Sonia Gillies-Da Mota, Co-Owner, Vandal Doughnuts*



### COMPASS DISTILLERS

#### What inspired you to open a new business?

We were inspired to open our business by the amazing craft distillers around the country and in the US; we saw an opportunity to make great spirits here at home using local ingredients to their fullest potential, an idea we have used in making award spirits such as our Spring GINS — an all Nova Scotian gin, awarded 2018 “Product of the Year” by Taste of Nova Scotia. Our compass keeps us on track to making the best, honest and most truly Nova Scotian spirits.

#### How did you get your start?

Starting a distillery is a challenge in financing, followed by an exercise in engineering, a lot of construction, followed by some distilling R&D. Once we picked an amazing location in the heart of Halifax, the rest flowed from that, with the project expanding and suffering a few bumps and delays along the way. We have been fortunate to work with amazing folks who have grabbed on to our vision and pulled in unison.

#### What is your proudest accomplishment?

We have had a few, but one of our proudest accomplishments was the first distillation — a rum, the first to be distilled in Halifax in modern times. The project until then had been a big construction project, which overshadowed the ultimate goal of distilling, so it was an excellent milestone to be able to turn on the equipment and distill some spirits. Finishing construction and starting distilling felt like graduating university and getting that first serious job, one journey had come to an end and the big leap to the next level had started.



### NANUK TECHNOLOGIES

#### Tell us one thing people may not know about your business?

We are a young company; all of us are under 25. For the past three years, we’ve been developing our skills, working to bring innovative virtual reality solutions to the market. A significant amount of this skills development, including research and groundwork, was done while our core team attended university.

#### How can we encourage youth to explore entrepreneurship as a possible future career?

Entrepreneurship is for people who don’t feel they fit particularly well into slots that society places them in. It isn’t about promoting entrepreneurship; it’s about encouraging people to find what makes them the happiest, and helping them reach their full potential. Doing what you love will pull you towards a happy future as long as you let it. Don’t be scared to follow that feeling; in fact, do yourself a favour and do everything in your power to pursue it.

#### What has been the biggest challenge to being a new business?

Growing a new business is always difficult; the odds are stacked against you, so to speak. We’re a brand-new business that specializes in brand new technology that’s trying to break into the real estate market, arguably one of the most traditional markets in the world. At Nanuk Technologies we are tasked with paving the way for a brand-new market. We have made our biggest challenge our biggest inspiration and motivation, and we won’t be stopping anytime soon.



**NEW SCOTLAND BREWING COMPANY**  
**NEW SCOTLAND BREWING CO.**

**Who/What inspired you to open a new business?**

Kevin and I had our New Scotland Clothing brand created and always thought it would align well with craft beer. When we met Mike (our business partner and brew master), and tried his beer recipes, we were excited and motivated to start working on a business plan together to see if we could make it work ... and we did!

**How did you get your start?**

Our friend, Mike Gillespie, was brewing beer on the side with a desire to be an entrepreneur. Kevin and Mike were chatting one day and got on the topic of going into business together combining the New Scotland brand and Mike's beer recipes and knowledge of business. It started to become more of a reality as we met on a regular basis (over a beer or two of course!) to start pulling together a business plan. About two years later, we were pouring beer from our new tap room! Exciting times!

**What is your proudest accomplishment?**

To be recognized by the Halifax Chamber of Commerce and become a Finalist for New Business of the Year!

**Do you have any tips for people who are thinking about starting their own business?**

Keep an open mind and ask a lot of questions to other entrepreneurs. Also, be open for taking advice. There isn't a lot of room for error when getting a business off of the ground. Working with an experienced mentor can help minimize any detrimental mistakes.

**How can we encourage youth to explore entrepreneurship as a possible future career?**

Hire and engage them in the daily business activities. Work closely with them on tasks and talk to them about your story and experiences during the building of the business.



**TART & SOUL CAFE**

**Why did you choose Halifax?**

Neither of us are from Halifax originally — Lisa is from Havre Boucher, Nova Scotia and Saf is from Richmond Hill, Ontario — but we both arrived here in 2005 and have been here ever since. Halifax is full of amazing people and ideas, and a bustling, vibrant community. So many incredible entrepreneurs are out here creating jobs for themselves and we are lucky to know so many of them. There is so much love in this city, so much capacity for community building, and so much room for growth.

**Tell us one thing people may not know about your business?**

We love our little cafe in the south end, but what people might not know is that we also wholesale to many different places across the HRM ranging from Spryfield (The Raven Espresso Boutique) to Sackville (Apartment 3) to Dartmouth (New Scotland Yard Emporium) and a few on the peninsula, too (Weird Harbour, Glitter Bean, The King's Galley, Scotia/Nova Pharmacy, and Atomic Cafe)! Our wholesale clients are the BEST and we don't know where we would be without them.

**Where do you see your organization in 10 years?**

In 10 years, we hope Tart & Soul is a thriving wholesale bakery and cafe. We also hope to be doing work that enriches the community: baking classes, nutrition/cooking workshops with sliding scale admission, and supporting small, local businesses whenever possible. We want to provide jobs for a solid group of people and a workplace that promotes wellness, self-efficacy and excitement. We want to support other entrepreneurs who are starting out, including offering consulting services for new start-ups.



**VANDAL DOUGHNUTS INC.**

**Who/What inspired you to open a new business?**

Vandal came to life very synergistically. Making the doughnuts began as a fun, creative outlet — which so happened to be cheaper than therapy — and snowballed very quickly into a full-blown business.

**How did you get your start?**

We started by trying out and doing decently well at two other business' together before starting Vandal. We used what we learned through our other ventures to knock it out of the park with Vandal.

**Why did you choose Halifax?**

We both have strong roots here in Halifax. It's our home and there would really be no other choice!

**Tell us one thing people may not know about your business?**

All new staff are required to take the Harry Potter house-sorting quiz upon being hired. Turns out Hufflepuffs make great bakers and doughnut decorators and Slytherins/Ravenclaws make for great managers.

**What is your proudest accomplishment?**

Our proudest accomplishment has been the overall high level of love and engagement we've received from the community. We have never seen anything like it before!

**How can we encourage youth to explore entrepreneurship as a possible future career?**

We found that entrepreneurship was never something that was held to the same degree of importance as other potential careers when we were coming up through the education system. We think it would be important to start there, but also as business owners to reach out and provide mentorship to those who are beginning and need help demystifying the process.



# SMALL BUSINESS of the year finalists



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## Small Business of the year finalists

L-R: *Kevin Sullivan, CEO, Appili Therapeutics Inc., Karen Campbell, Co-Owner, Totally Raw Pet Food, Scott Saccary, Co-Founder, New Scotland Clothing Co., Leah Boody, President, Pineapple Bytes, Heather Rankin, Co-Owner, Sommelier, Obladee, A Wine Bar*



### APPILI THERAPEUTICS

#### Where do you see your organization in five years?

We envision Appili Therapeutics operating as an established pharmaceutical company headquartered in Halifax and impacting patients and healthcare professionals globally. We'll be a major force in the global fight to combat the drug resistant bacteria that threaten our way of life. We plan to have at least two novel infectious-disease-fighting therapies available to patients. Revenue from these programs will fuel the development of additional transformational life-saving R&D programs, and we will continue to support the burgeoning life-sciences sector in Halifax.

#### How is your business contributing to making Halifax a better place?

We are creating highly skilled well-paying jobs, training a new generation of biotechnology leaders, and recruiting drug development experts to the region. With growing industry awareness and global engagement, we are catalyzing the growth of Halifax's life-sciences sector.

#### Why did you choose Halifax?

I (Kevin) grew up in Dartmouth and did undergraduate work at Dalhousie. Connections to family and friends, and the impressive entrepreneurial support systems, made Halifax a great city in which to found Appili. Halifax has everything a small biotechnology company needs: world-class universities, a great talent base, incubator programs, and modern lab facilities. We have been able to recruit and retain top local talent, who enjoy a great quality of life here in Halifax.



**NEW SCOTLAND CLOTHING COMPANY**

**NEW SCOTLAND CLOTHING CO.**

#### What has been the biggest challenge to being a small business?

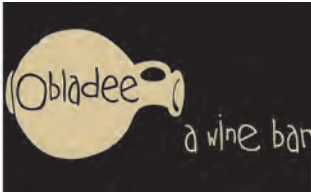
In my opinion, managing our inventory and cash flow. In a small business, there isn't much room for error, so it is important to educate, ask questions and avoid any potential mistakes before they happen, if not, it could be detrimental. Working with a mentor is a great way to help navigate through challenges like this.

#### Does your business engage youth and/or immigrants? What does that bring to your business?

All of our employees are young adults. They run the daily sales operations of our business at our retail locations. They also have different roles within the business to manage important tasks such as social media, customer service, inventory, merchandising, analyze existing clothing designs, and to help create new ones. They are the ones that keep our business running day to day so that we (Scott and Kevin) can focus on creating new business opportunities for growth.

#### How is your business contributing to making Halifax a better place?

We build relationships through connecting and collaborating with other entrepreneurs with the goal to create opportunities for Nova Scotians and add depth to industry in Nova Scotia. We give generously to fundraising initiatives and volunteer our time with non-profit groups. We spread NS's spirit wherever we go and are contributing to the tourism market. A majority of our sales come from X-Pats abroad and tourists returning to their country with our NS branded clothing. We feel that we are NS ambassadors and that makes us very proud of what we do.



**OBLADEE, A WINE BAR**

**What would you say is your organization’s proudest achievement?**

I hope this is not too pessimistic an achievement, but I would say our proudest moment was when we saved Obladee from an uncertain future by taking our new landlord to Supreme Court for unlawfully trying to increase our rent once he took ownership of the building. The court ended up ruling in our favour (and we also won to have our expenses covered). This was a long and taxing ordeal, and it reminded us both of the erratic and fragile nature of this industry, and of the general lack of support and protection for tenants in commercial lease agreements. On a positive note, it highlighted our physical and mental toughness, our intelligence, intuition and demonstrated the lengths we are willing to go to protect our business.

**What brings customers back to you?**

I think customers come back to us because they trust us. They trust us to make them feel good, they trust that the wine will be solid, that their server will know their stuff, that the food will be well thought out and that the space will be clean and inviting. I think “consistency” is an undervalued term in the hospitality industry — it is kind of unsexy to talk about — but it is unquestionably what brings people back.

**Why did you choose Halifax?**

We chose Halifax firstly because we were both from here. I had been away for over 20 years, and Christian for about 10 and there was a desire on both of our parts to return. We also chose Halifax because of opportunity. We were both coming from larger cities where markets were already saturated and leaseholds were completely unaffordable. Halifax provided an accessible, penetrable market, adequate population, reasonable commercial rents and at that time, few competitors in the type of space we were looking to occupy. We could get in on the “ground level” so to speak — the city seemed primed and ready for what we were about to do.



**PINEAPPLE BYTES**

**What would you say is your organization’s proudest achievement?**

Pineapple Byte’s proudest achievement has been our ability to launch a new brand and create a culture where clients, vendors, business partners and employees feel respected and appreciated. Over the past three years, we have successfully recruited and retained additional employees growing our workforce by more than 40 per cent. Employee surveys continue to reinforce the success we have achieved in developing a positive culture.

**If you could follow in the footsteps of a successful business, which would it be and why?**

There are so many successful businesses it really is hard to pick just one. Rather than follow in the footsteps of a successful business, I would like to see Pineapple Bytes follow the footsteps of a successful leader. Darren Nantes has led a number of successful companies in Halifax including G3 Galvanizing, Twin City Painting and Guildfords Group to name a few. Darren’s ability to see opportunity, develop and execute strategy and lead teams is exemplary. His businesses employ hundreds of people and operate with professionalism and integrity. Darren’s quiet contributions to charitable organizations are a testament to his character.

**Where do you see your organization in five years?**

I expect to continue to expand our operation over the coming years. With clients coast to coast, I expect to have offices elsewhere in Canada and to be recognized as the leading provider of business management solutions to retail and hospitality clients.

**Why did you choose Halifax?**

I can’t imagine having a head office anywhere else. Despite attending university in Ontario and working in Bermuda for four years, I always knew I would come back to my roots. I have always been a believer that opportunities can be created anywhere if you’re willing to work hard and be creative.



**TOTALLY RAW PET FOOD**

**What would you say is your organization’s proudest achievement?**

As the owners of Totally Raw Pet Food, we are very proud to have dedicated our careers to providing our customers with a clean, pure and simple approach to pet wellness. We started Totally Raw Pet Food to bring holistic and healthy pet nutrition options to the mainstream pet food market. Our proudest achievement is experiencing and participating in the pure joy of our customers’ stories and photos of their happy, thriving, canine and feline companions.

**If you could follow in the footsteps of a successful business, which would it be and why?**

Totally Raw Pet Food identified a void in an emerging market and seized the opportunity to fill the space with a quality product that takes advantage of unique Atlantic Canadian resources. We have looked to Acadian Seaplants as a local success story that followed a similar business opportunity. Acadian Seaplants’ innovative use of local agri-food resources like seaweed has successfully transitioned from a tiny Nova Scotian family operation to become one of Nova Scotia’s leading exporters and a global industry leader.

**Where do you see your organization in five years?**

At Totally Raw Pet food, we aspire to be the Canadian and Nova Scotian brand that helps revolutionize the global pet health market. We are planning now so that by 2023 we will be exporting Totally Raw Pet Food products to Asia, the US and Europe from our local production and distribution facility. We will have branded products in stores across Canada and will have our own stores throughout Atlantic Canada’s urban communities.



# EXPORT BUSINESS of the year finalists



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## Export Business of the year finalists

L-R: *Mike Johnston, President & CEO, REDspace, Chris Oldham, President, InterTalk; Chris Burns, President & CEO, Novonix*  
Missing: *Moog Focal Technologies, First Catch Fisheries Co. Ltd.*



### FIRST CATCH FISHERIES CO., LTD.

#### What is your organization's biggest achievement to date?

Since our establishment in 2016, our company has sent 36 cargo charter planes from Halifax, Nova Scotia to China. Currently, three cargo planes are scheduled per week, each plane carries 220,000 pounds of seafood. In addition, our company has expanded investment with a warehouse with more than 29,000 square feet of high-standard venue at the airport. We have completed the renovations inside and outside of the building to make it the largest cargo centre for live seafood in Atlantic Canada.

#### What is your favorite region or country to do business with?

Until now, our company's main target market was Asia with the Chinese market as the centre. The Chinese seafood market, especially the imported seafood market, has maintained a rapid growth trend. China is considered to be the largest market for seafood consumption in the future.

#### What has been the biggest challenge you have faced as an exporter?

Each target country sets its own import policy, standard and information requirements. Failing to meet the requirements may lead to serious consequence. With the assistance from our local CFIA Halifax office, we are able to provide the most accurate information for the designated market, ensuring the seafood products we export are the freshest and most vibrant.



### INTER-TALK CRITICAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS

#### What is your favorite region or country to do business with?

More than 90 per cent of our business is done in the United States, although each region provides its own diversity and culture, much like here at home in Canada. Oregon is very similar to Nova Scotia in terms of its topography and climate (which means it is beautiful!), but you cannot beat California for a place to visit, especially in winter time.

#### What has been the biggest challenge you have faced as an exporter?

The recent surge in Nationalism across many countries, especially with our partner to the South, has caused a great deal of uncertainty within export markets — will the doors remain open to us? Will other countries allow disputes with the United States to impact their buying decisions with Canadian companies? Although it is challenging to witness this trend, it is vital that we maintain our course regarding exports and recognize that the world cannot thrive without mutual trade and exporting.

#### What do you feel is your biggest contribution to the local business community?

InterTalk is doing its part in promoting Halifax as a strong technology and innovation centre — we tout the fact that our city boasts multiple high-end universities, creating a young, talented workforce, access to both North American and European markets and perhaps most of all, the right attitude toward serving our customers. Halifax is becoming a well-known destination for sourcing high-quality products and services and great place to visit!



**MOOG FOCAL TECHNOLOGIES**

**What inspired your company to become involved in export?**

Moog Focal is primarily an export business. We are known for innovative, high-performing and customized products designed for the harshest marine and defense markets. The vast majority of these opportunities reside outside of Canada, and indeed worldwide, therefore, requiring a strong focus on export. It was clear when the company started more than 30 years ago that in order to show continued growth, we needed to find and delight customers worldwide with our solutions to their challenging problems.

**What is your organization's biggest achievement to date?**

Moog Focal has had many achievements and it has been amazing to grow from our early roots of being connected to the Nova Scotia Research Foundation to a company well known worldwide. Our employees are very proud for being known in the marine market as one of the top-performing, high-quality and customer-centric companies in the industry. From having products used to help find the Titanic to expanding our global reach and impact, we have lots to be proud of and a bright future ahead.

**What has been the biggest challenge you have faced as an exporter?**

Moog Focal's biggest challenge as an exporter is understanding and adapting to both the macro-economic conditions, as well as the specific nuances for the many unique regions we deliver our products and services to around the world. As well, geo-political influences, such as trade agreements also make being an exporter difficult at times. It takes a strong passion, significant persistence, as well as a flexible strategy in order to export to a wide range of end markets and regions.



**NOVONIX**

**What inspired your company to become involved in export?**

Novonix was founded to provide equipment and services to the growing lithium-ion battery market. This is a global market with large investments in research and manufacturing of lithium-ion batteries occurring across Asia, Europe and the United States. Therefore, to service this market it meant targeting and exporting to customers around the world, while being located here in Halifax.

**What is your organization's biggest achievement to date?**

Novonix's biggest achievement to date would be the recognition of its work and products by companies in international markets. Novonix secured an equity investment from Contemporary Amperex Technology Limited (CATL), the largest lithium-ion battery manufacturer in China in 2016. In 2017, Novonix was acquired by a battery materials supplier from Australia looking to expand its capabilities. Attracting this type of interest means the work we are doing locally matters significantly to the industry on a global scale.

**Why did you choose Halifax?**

We started Novonix from work we were doing at Dalhousie University and Halifax was home to the founders. Although we were targeting such a vast international market in the lithium-ion battery sector, no matter where the company was situated, it would be necessary to ship products around the world, so we did not have to leave Halifax. We were also very happy to find a reliable local supply chain and establish a network of companies we can work with to further advance our aggressive growth strategies.

**REDSpace**

**What inspired your company to become involved in export?**



REDSpace has been involved in export from the beginning. When I moved back to Nova Scotia, after going to school and working in Boston, I had a number of relationships that I brought with me. I realized quickly that by hiring smart people and building strong relationships with our clients, I could do this type of work from anywhere — so why not do it from home?

**What is your favorite region or country to do business with?**

Our oldest and most productive patch has been the United States. In recent years, we have expanded into other markets, in part by adding value to the international arms of our large US clients. We support an industry that is emerging and evolving globally, and we're keen to build relationships in other countries that also need our capabilities and experience.

**What is your organization's biggest achievement to date?**

I'm really proud that I've been able to help REDSpace achieve global success while bucking many of the more negative trends in our industry. Unlike other IT shops, we run projects to ensure people only work Monday to Friday, 9 to 5. We've shown we can live outside the urban centres, but still work for the world's leading entertainment brands. Junior and senior staff are incented to critique and learn from each other, helping us achieve a level of collaboration and selflessness that's rare in our industry. All of this has led to staff and client retention rates that are twice the industry average or better. We've grown a density of world-class talent here that our clients say they simply haven't seen before and it's setting us apart. Our people trust each other, and I'm proud that I've earned their trust. And as someone born and raised in the province, who left for a decade, I am probably most proud that I've been able to give 170 people meaningful careers and another reason to stay here in Nova Scotia.



# INNOVATIVE BUSINESS of the year finalists



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Rowe School of Business

## Innovative Business of the year finalists

L-R: *Brett Newcombe, Vice President, Operations, BBD Thermal Remediation, Matthew MacDonald, Chief Engineer, InterTalk, Monique Pellerin, Marketing and Proposal Coordinator, Bluedrop Training & Simulation, Gregg Curwin, CEO, TruLeaf. Missing: Jeremy Koenig, CEO, Athletigen Technologies Inc.*



### ATHLETIGEN TECHNOLOGIES INC.

#### What is your organization's proudest accomplishment?

Athletigen's proudest moment was launching our newest product, the ALTIS Sport Performance Report, a DNA product created in partnership with the world-class coaches and athletes at ALTIS, a track and field centre in Phoenix, Arizona, home to dozens of Olympic athletes and coaches from 30 countries. Through ALTIS, we learned to optimize how DNA information can be explained to athletes and their coaches, ensuring that DNA is integrated optimally, so as to help each athlete define their individual path to success.

#### What inspired your business's innovation efforts?

When I was 15 years old, my mother was diagnosed with MS. She told me, "Don't worry, it's not genetic," triggering a mission to both save her and a two-decade long accumulation of specialized knowledge focused on understanding the balance between nature and nurture.

While completing my PhD at Dalhousie in biochemistry and molecular biology and captaining the track team, I combined my studies with my athletic passion and pondered, 'What if in addition to understanding the role of DNA in the pathology of disease, we also studied human capability?'



### BBD THERMAL REMEDIATION

#### What inspired your business' innovation efforts?

Our president, Brian, a cancer survivor and a veteran pest control technician, was determined to find a chemical-free treatment option that worked. He was growing increasingly tired of the repeated service calls for chemical sprays, knowing he would ultimately be back as the bed bugs had built up a chemical resistance to the pesticides being applied. BBD Thermal is one of the only pest control companies in the country that has created and built their own thermal remediation system.

#### What is your organization's proudest accomplishment?

BBD's proudest accomplishment is our community support (Adsum House, Parker Street Furniture Bank, Metro Turning Point, Shelter NS, Riverview United Church). From the beginning, we have had one goal in mind — help those in need! Pest control has been an excellent platform for us — we have helped individuals that were prisoners in their own homes (fear of being judged and/or spreading the issue), to helping families whose children were being turned away from school because of a problem at home.

#### What advice would you give to another business that wants to embrace innovation?

Find something you are passionate about and that you could see yourself pursuing for the long term. Due diligence is paramount — do your homework and leave no stone unturned. Monitor the competition — can you provide superior results, a more cost-efficient product/service or an alternative that is safer for the environment? Ensure you have the right people in the right seats on the bus (the bus being your business).



## BLUEDROP TRAINING & SIMULATION

### What inspired your business' innovation efforts?

Our innovation efforts are based on our constant efforts to add value and adapt to our customers new training requirements. In this era of mobile and digital technologies, it is important to adapt our training to ensure that we keep new trainees motivated. More specifically, millennials.

### What is your organization's proudest accomplishment?

We started from a blank sheet of paper to create a new generation of rear crew trainer using VR and body tracking technologies and we are having success in creating a new breed of simulators for rear crew mission training. We have a simulator in Philadelphia at Boeing's Chinook's manufacturing plant, we have a Hoist Mission Training System in Shearwater for the CH-148 Cyclone helicopter and we will be announcing further sales in Canada and in the United States in the very near future. Bluedrop is becoming a household name in the industry.

### What is something new that's happening at your company?

We are beneficiaries of a Strategic Innovation Funding project from Industry Canada that will provide stable funding for innovation for the next five years. Through this development, we will be able to use big data analytics to provide real time, objective feedback to trainees based on data. This will revolutionize how trainees are assessed and how training can be continuously improved. We're now becoming a widely recognized company in the domain.

### What is your definition of innovation?

Innovation, for us, is survival. In the domain we're in, if we do not innovate we will step backwards and disappear. Innovation keeps us at the forefront of our domain. But more importantly, it helps us to continue to satisfy the needs of our customers.



## INTER TALK CRITICAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS

### What inspired your business' innovation efforts?

For us, innovation is not new. We have focused on the "new and exciting" since our inception, 21 years ago. Our products support first responders — police, fire and EMS personnel who put their lives on the line every day. We are driven to innovate products and solutions that protect them and allow them to work faster, with no mistakes. If we do well, we save lives. If we screw up, people can die. For us, innovation is not an afterthought. It is wired into our being.

### What is your organization's proudest accomplishment?

When my business partner and I formed our company back in 1997, we had three aspirations: (a) to make a living; (b) to have fun and (c) to create a place for our friends. Our proudest accomplishment is in the creation of just such a company, where our friends, both new and old, have joined us to realize the vision of the founders.

### What advice would you give to another business that wants to embrace innovation?

Start! The enemy of innovation is procrastination. Find the funding. Find the talent. Find the time. And just do it!

### What is something new that's happening at your company?

Last year, we created a separate organization within our company to foster leading-edge innovation. We call it InterTalk Innovations and Research (IIR), which just happens to be the electrical equation for POWER. We know that what powers every company is innovation. It just turns out that our company has the POWER of Innovation even in its name!



Farming. Anywhere.®

## TRULEAF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

### What inspired your business' innovation efforts?

TruLeaf was founded to deliver local, fresh and nutritious food to Canadians. Gregg Curwin, TruLeaf's founder, had a background in healthcare and was deeply disturbed by what he saw in the industry. He believed that producing nutritious food year-round via vertical farming, was the most effective way to make an impact on the public health crisis he witnessed during the decades he worked in the industry.

### What is your organization's proudest accomplishment?

TruLeaf began as many innovative and leading-edge companies do, with a unique solution to a complicated problem. With a desire to transform how Canadians source and eat nutrient-dense leafy greens, TruLeaf built a small-scale research facility in Truro, NS. Fast forward five years, the proof of concept for a GoodLeaf vertical farm (the name of the consumer-facing brand) was complete and the Smart Farm System® created. The GoodLeaf brand launched in local Atlantic Loblaw and specialty food retailers in 2016. Over the last three years, we have grown a strong fan base with Atlantic consumers and restaurants and are proud to say we have dramatically improved the accessibility of fresh, leafy greens for Atlantic Canadians, even in the harshest winter months. We have set our sights on expanding our network of farms across Canada and we are now nearing completion on one of the largest commercial vertical farms in North America, situated in Guelph, Ontario. Ontarians will be able to enjoy our fresh, nutrient — dense leafy greens this Winter 2019.

### What advice would you give to another business that wants to embrace innovation?

Surround yourself with people who compliment your skillset, invest in R&D, be tenacious and look to other industries for inspiration. Entrepreneurship, as many have said, is a marathon not a sprint.



# BUSINESS of the year finalists



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## Business of the year finalists

L-R: *Matt Rogers, President, Bishop's Cellar, Chantal Webster, Vice President, Minuteman Press, Tony Nahas, President & CEO, Mezza Lebanese Restaurant Group, Adam McLean, Vice President, Development, Armco Group of Companies. Missing: VistaCare Communications*



### ARMCO GROUP OF COMPANIES

#### What would you say is your organization's biggest achievement?

Building a North American-wide real estate portfolio from Halifax.

#### How have you helped Halifax grow?

Armco has built hundreds of affordable homes across Halifax, including recent developments in Spryfield and Eastern Passage. Secondly, Armco is a leading developer of iconic Halifax landmarks, such as the former World Trade Centre and the Willow Tree Tower. Thirdly, Armco is an innovative P3 partner with government on school construction and maintenance.

#### What is something new that's happening at your company?

Armco is directly investing in the construction of an entire new community, The Garrison, in Eastern Passage. This community will provide affordable housing, with modern amenities, to families in the area.

#### Why did you choose Halifax?

Armco started in Halifax. We have been a significant part of the development scene here and continue to invest in the future of Halifax. Even as we expand across Canada and the US, we chose to retain Halifax as our home base.

#### What one piece of advice would you give to a new business?

Be passionate about what you do.



### BISHOP'S CELLAR

#### How have you helped Halifax grow?

Local businesses are more than economic drivers, they are part of our community's unique identity and cultural fabric. We are intentional in our commitment to Halifax; working to strengthen our city by being good neighbours and helping to co-create a vision for a vibrant city. To do so, we focus our energies on three areas: 1) Tirelessly promoting local producers to our retail and restaurant customers. 2) Sourcing products and services from local businesses. 3) Giving back to our community.

#### What would you say is your organization's biggest achievement?

Long-term retention and development of our specialized staff. Our continued growth and success has provided our employees the opportunity to flourish and expand their roles within our organization. Subsequently, they have stayed and built their lives here in Halifax. We are very proud of the fact that over one-third of our team has been with Bishop's Cellar for more than 10 years. The success of our business is directly related to our ability to retain our incredibly talented employees.

#### What is something new that's happening at your company?

We're excited to announce that, after 15 years, we are expanding our retail space in Bishop's Landing. Downtown Halifax is thriving, with thousands of new residents choosing downtown as their new home, and we're thrilled to contribute to its continued revitalization.

Building on the foundation of exceptional customer service and knowledgeable staff, our larger retail footprint will offer consumers a streamlined store layout, an improved pick-up in-store experience and expanded product selections. We believe in the future of Halifax and we can't wait to share our vision with our customers and partners in the coming months.



## MINUTEMAN PRESS

### What would you say is your organization's biggest achievement?

Our growth. Eight years ago, I met my wife and they had a staff of six, including her father and brother. By the end of 2018, we will be more than 30. There is no end to this family's dedication and determination to be the number one printer in Halifax and number one Minuteman in Canada. We are currently number two in all of Canada for the franchise.

### How have you helped Halifax grow?

Jobs is the big one here, I think. We have provided many people with jobs and many are still with us. That directly impacts the local economy as they spend what they earn here, supporting other businesses both small and large.

### What one piece of advice would you give to a new business?

Honestly? Hard work. If you are going to start a new business and are not prepared to give it your all ... it will not last. We work long days, weekends and sometimes do not get to go away on vacations. Why? Because we are passionate about the work. So ... BE PASSIONATE about the work you are doing, then it won't seem so much like work. That pride you feel at the end of that long day will resonate into longevity as a business.

### Why did you choose Halifax?

The Maheux family was born and raised in the Halifax area. It was a no-brainer to serve the public and area they knew so well.

### What is something new that's happening at your company?

We just expanded again! We closed on two companies in January and have now hired a salesperson to field the extra work. Our clothing division is one of the fastest growing areas of our company and a dedicated person to that is paramount. So we are excited to see where this takes us in this exciting new branch of our work here in the community.



## VISTACARE

### What would you say is your organization's biggest achievement?

Over the years, we have grown to become one of the top North American communications contractors.

We have a strong reputation for on-time delivery and expertise in large-scale fibre optic builds that sets us apart from the competition.

### What one piece of advice would you give to a new business?

Have a vision, a plan and a strategy — and then be willing to adapt, change and evolve as new challenges arise. It is important to know your strengths, as well as your weaknesses — know what you don't want to do or need to improve on, always measure and manage along the way.

### How have you helped grow Halifax?

We've put a lot of focus into building quality careers based from our head office, here in HRM. By centralizing our North American support services from our Bedford head office, we have created a wide range of positions from administration to executive management.

### Why did you choose Halifax?

The company was started, here in Halifax, with just a handful of people and a couple of trucks. As we grew and expanded across Canada, we wanted to ensure that we maintained our Halifax roots. Plus, the work ethic of Atlantic Canadians cannot be beat!

### What is something new that is happening at your company?

This past year we have really started to grow our business in the US. Prior to 2018, we had a handful of employees working stateside from project-to-project, but this past year, we have built a solid foundation and we are now working with several customers in several different states.



## MEZZA

### What would you say is your organization's biggest achievement?

Our organization's biggest achievement would have to be the success of our recent move to begin franchising. Within the past year we have developed a robust franchising plan and have successfully franchised four locations: Sydney, Upper Tantallon, Dalhousie Student's Union and Cole Harbour. Each of these locations exceeded our expectations and we're incredibly proud of our franchise owners. Hopefully we can keep us this momentum as we move into the new year and continue bringing Mezza to towns across Nova Scotia and even across the border into other Maritime provinces.

### What one piece of advice would you give to a new business?

My one piece of advice to any new business would be to never stop innovating. Risks have to be taken to try something different or new. The moment you stop innovating your business, someone else is getting ahead of you. It is a crucial to be pushing the envelope and exploring new technologies to stand out from the crowd.

### Why did you choose Halifax?

My parents immigrated to Halifax in the '60s so while my family's roots have always been in Lebanon, I was born in Halifax and it has always been my true home. I couldn't imagine working or growing my business any where else. I have been serving great food to the Halifax community since I was 16 years old and I have no plans on stopping.

### What is something new that's happening at your company?

There is a lot on the go for 2018! Mezza will be releasing a whole new product line, franchising into New Brunswick and our complete nutritional information will be available to our customers. These are just a few things people can expect in 2018 and we can't wait to show everyone what we've been working on.





# BUSINESS LEADER of the year finalists



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## Business Leader of the year finalists

L-R: *Joe McGuinness, Co-Owner, Legendary Hospitality, Myrna Gillis, Founder and CEO, Aqualitas, Karim George, CEO, InTouch Communications, Joyce Carter, President & CEO, Halifax International Airport Authority, Tony Nahas, President & CEO, Mezza Lebanese Restaurant Group,*



**JOYCE CARTER,**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO, HALIFAX INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AUTHORITY

### What would you say is your biggest accomplishment to date as a business leader?

With the support of my Executive Management Team and our Board of Directors, I've strategically positioned Halifax Stanfield for ongoing growth. As a result, our airport has achieved continual passenger growth and cargo growth, made significant capital investments in the facility to meet current and future demands and generated ever-increasing economic contributions to our region. In 2017, Halifax Stanfield was worth \$3 billion annually to the provincial economy, an increase \$1.71 billion from 2014 when I became CEO.

### What leadership advice would you give an up-and-comer?

Don't let failures get you down. It might seem easy to throw in the towel when things don't go according to plan, but that's not how success is achieved. Failure tests your character, teaches you lessons and uncovers your strengths and your weaknesses, revealing more about yourself than successes. Failure is a fundamental part of learning and of success. What matters is how you deal with failures when they come your way.

### What steps does Halifax need to get to the next level?

We must continue to embrace innovation and strive to transform our community and organizations into something bigger and bolder than perhaps we've ever envisioned. We're doing that by evolving our airport into a larger, more strategic hub. As the closest continental airport in North America to Europe, Halifax Stanfield is well positioned to evolve into a gateway to and from Canada, complementing existing hubs in eastern Canada by implementing new non-stop flights to Europe, with feed from services in Canada and the United States.



**MYRNA GILLIS,**  
CEO, AQUALITAS INC.

### What would you say is your biggest accomplishment to date as a business leader?

My biggest accomplishment to date has been leading a diverse and talented team in an unprecedented industry, which is anticipated to grow into a \$200-billion global economy. We have been able to buildout, license, organically certify and fund the largest cannabis production facility in Nova Scotia. While doing so, we have developed innovative cultivation technology in partnership with leading Nova Scotia universities, all while remaining true to our values and vision, which embraces renewal through environmental sustainability, economic development and the promotion of wellness.

**What’s the best business advice you’ve ever been given?**

The best advice I’ve ever received is to know when to let go and pivot. You can’t fix everything and sometimes dwelling on a problem too long can prevent you from moving forward in a much better direction.

**What leadership advice would you give an up-and-comer?**

It is very important that you love what you do. This will continue to inspire you to do great things even when you are faced with overwhelming obstacles. Passion for what you do will also give you a tremendous sense of satisfaction and accomplishment when you hit the milestones that you set for yourself and your company. Surrounding yourself with like-minded people makes a path forward exceedingly rewarding, fun and meaningful.



**KARIM GEORGE,**  
CEO, INTOUCH COMMUNICATIONS

**What’s the best business advice you’ve ever been given?**

The best advice I’ve ever been given was to focus on the success of others over my own. I see, very clearly, that my success is completely dependent on the success of others. If my goal is to help my staff and clients reach their goals, I will reach my own in return. There’s also a great deal of satisfaction in helping others succeed, so even when success doesn’t come quite as quickly as you’d like for yourself, you still enjoy the journey.

**What steps does Halifax need to get to the next level?**

Halifax needs to continue to increase opportunities for mentorship and support for new businesses of all sizes. We need education and programs in place to encourage people to take risks, partner on new initiatives and invest in opportunities. Halifax is a great place to do business, with plenty of support, but there’s always room for improvement.

**If you weren’t in this line of work what would you be doing?**

It’s very difficult to imagine myself not working in the marketing and video production industry, but if I wasn’t, I know I would still be an entrepreneur and business leader as that’s my greatest passion. Perhaps, I would be involved in business development, maybe working in the investment or financial industry.



**JOE MCGUINNESS,**  
CO-OWNER, LEGENDARY  
HOSPITALITY GROUP

**What would you say is your biggest accomplishment to date as a business leader?**

Working with my business partners in creating four separate companies, consisting of more than 200 skilled and dedicated employees, focused on the singular mission of delivering Legendary Hospitality Experiences to all of our guests.

**What’s the best business advice you’ve ever been given?**

Attract, hire and retain the best employees that buy into the company’s vision and mission and provide them with the training, guidance and support to bring the company to that desired future state.

**What leadership advice would you give an up-and-comer?**

Learn who you are first, assess your leadership style and from there, inspire by vision and passion in everything you do.

**What steps does Halifax need to get to the next level?**

Identify ways and means to have financial capital invested, here, in Halifax. Make our city more attractive to investors to create employment for Nova Scotians and allow them the opportunity to stay here and work.



**TONY NAHAS,**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO, MEZZA  
LEBANESE RESTAURANT GROUP

**What would you say is your biggest accomplishment to date as a business leader?**

Our biggest accomplishment as a business leader was opening our first Mezza franchise location in Sydney, NS in 2017. This was the culmination of years of preparation for our company as we prepared our system and business to become a franchise model. We were thrilled to have our first franchise location open without a hitch. We then proceeded to open three more franchises that year and we are gearing up for several more in the years to come.

**What’s the best business advice you’ve ever been given?**

The best advice I’ve ever received was from my father — it was simple, but set me on a path for the rest of my career. He’d remind me everyday to just “work hard.” As the saying goes, “hard work beats talent when talent fails to work hard.” Focus on the hard work and the talent will follow.

**What leadership advice would you give an up-and-comer?**

Up-and-comers need to remember that their road to success will be challenging. They will face their fair share of ups and downs and will be moving at a million miles a minute to get to their ultimate goal. But while they’re focused on their end goal, don’t forget to stop and enjoy the journey along the way. It’s often the journey that creates the lasting memories and friends — the goal is just a moving target.

**What’s next for you?**

The next steps in our business will be taking our organization from a Nova Scotia-based restaurant to a nation-wide franchise system with Mezza locations in every beautiful town in Canada.