



NEWS

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SBA Names Minnesota Small Business Person of the Year

BEMIDJI – Andrew Wells III, President and CEO of Wells Technology based in Bemidji, Minn., has been named the Minnesota Small Business Person of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The Small Business Person of the year is selected annually based on growth in sales or unit volume, increase in the number of employees, financial strength, innovativeness of product or service and evidence of contributions to community-oriented projects. Sherri Komrosky, Program Director of the Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC), nominated Wells for this award.

Andy Wells is a member of the Red Lake Ojibwa Tribe and still maintains his family farm on the Red Lake Reservation. Andy graduated with a Master of Science degree from Bemidji State University in 1969 and spent 17 years teaching in public schools and universities. During this time, he authored several text books on electronics and received U.S. patents on 7 new products. From 1986 to 1989, Andy served as an Automation Consultant to Control Data Corporation in Minneapolis. In 1989, Andy began Wells Technology with an investment of \$1,300 to manufacture industrial tools and fasteners for customers while also creating jobs for economically disadvantaged people. To serve the Native American people of Northern Minnesota, the Wells Technology facility was located between the three reservations of Red Lake, Leech Lake, and White Earth. In 1994, Andy began precision manufacturing with CNC machining equipment and BAE Systems was one of the first major aerospace companies to begin doing business with Wells Technology. As the business grew in the early years, Wells Technology worked with the MMSDC, SBA, and PTAC agencies to obtain the certifications of SDB, 8(a), HUB Zone, and MBE.

In 2004, Andy realized he needed management training to grow the company beyond 14 employees. Therefore, he worked with the Fastenal Company to develop an SBA-approved mentor-protégé agreement. With mentoring from Fastenal, Wells Technology developed a growth strategy by expanding manufacturing and beginning national distribution of industrial supplies. As business grew through 2008, Wells Technology had added many new jobs for a total of 32 employees.

However, new jobs required industrial skills that Native American people did not have. Therefore, in 2006, Andy began using profits to invest in the Native American people by creating Wells Academy, a 501c3 non-profit school for industrial training. This is an apprentice program which respects Native American cultural values while providing marketable technical skills and achieves a 92% retention rate.

Andy also supports his community through his roles on several local and state boards, community councils, economic development efforts, and as a mentor to other entrepreneurs. In 2007, Andy received the “Entrepreneur of the Year” award from the Metropolitan Economic Development Commission which is located in Minneapolis. Then, in 2008, Andy received the “American Indian Business of the Year” from the National Center for American Indian Economic Development which represents all 560 tribes in America. Andy believes that success in life also brings a responsibility to be significant by doing good things to help other people.

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