

ENTREPRENEURS OF THE YEAR



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Brian Gingras, left, and Jose Correia, owners of Bee-Clean, are all smiles accepting their honours in Calgary.

Janitorial kingpins clean up

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Brian Gingras and his cleaning company have swept up a pair of 2003 Prairies Entrepreneur of the Year honours.

"We're not a real glamorous company," said the surprised Edmontonian, half-owner of Bee-Clean Building Maintenance Inc. "A business like ours isn't recognized very often. I mean, we clean toilets."

But Bee-Clean has clout. The largest institutional cleaning company in Canada with revenue of more than \$100 million annually, it employs 5,000 people in 23 locations from Quebec to British Columbia, including 1,200 in Edmonton. Gingras oversees operations in the western provinces, while partner Jose Correia tends to eastern business from Winnipeg.

Bee-Clean employees clean 90 million square feet of space daily. Edmonton clients include refineries, hospitals, bus shelters, Royal Bank branches, the Skyreach Centre and office highrises.

Judges for the Ernst & Young awards cited Bee-Clean's technological and environmental initiatives, and business success.

Things have changed a lot in 26 years, Gingras said in an interview from Calgary, hours after receiving the award at the Telus Convention Centre. Productivity has improved from 2,000 square-feet per hour to 5,500. "We're very systemized in how we do things."

Bee-Clean leads the industry in retention of staff, the award noted. "We try to pay better than our competition. We have a lot of long-term employees with 20-year plus service," Gingras said.

In addition to beating out 45 other companies for the top overall prize as

Prairies Entrepreneur of the Year, Bee-Clean also received a second plaque for its business-to-business products and services.

There were seven other category winners, including three in the Calgary area, two in Winnipeg and one each in Moose Jaw and Minnedosa. The victory enters Bee-Clean in a national contest.

For Gingras, the limelight is dizzying. Back in 1978, while seeking a career change, the trained hydrocarbon technologist and power engineer had an opportunity to buy a Bee-Clean franchise.

He had wanted to be an entrepreneur for some time and made the jump, although even now it puzzles him a bit. "Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would run a janitorial company."

At age 49, he's been doing it for 25 years.

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