

Eco-firm gets top honours

Ottawa developer nets McGill award

By DAVE PIZER

WHILE MUCH of Canada's business community has warned of dire financial consequences as a result of the Kyoto Protocol, for one Ottawa developer, protecting the planet has paid off in more ways than one.

Just three years after starting his own green development company, Christopher Sweetnam-Holmes, 29, shared the stage with several business giants at a McGill University awards ceremony last week.

"I was absolutely shocked because we're a small company ... and I get this letter from the dean at the faculty of management saying, 'We want to give you this award and look at all the people that have won before,'" said Sweetnam-Holmes. "I was blown away."

Sweetnam-Holmes is the founder of EcoCite, a development company that builds environmentally friendly and energy-efficient condos in city settings. He was awarded a McGill management achievement award at a ceremony last Friday. His fellow recipients included Manulife Financial Corp. CEO Dominic D'Alessandro, Canada's Social Development Minister Ken Dryden, CGI Group Inc. CEO Serge Godin and Guylaine Saucier, who sits on the board of Bank of Montreal, Petro Canada and Nortel Networks.

Students 'excited'

The award recognizes business leaders who have made a "significant contribution to the Canadian economy and way of life."

Sweetnam-Holmes thought it was telling that a group of students selected him.

"I thought that was particularly relevant, because they seem to be really excited about businesspeople that are trying to integrate social

and environmental entrepreneurship into their business practices," said Sweetnam-Holmes. "That's what gets them excited; they see it as the future."

Rideau Canal project

Sweetnam-Holmes created quite a buzz in Montreal after constructing an eight-unit prototype "Eco-Condo" in the city. He has also lectured at Concordia and McGill and tells students about how business and environmental entrepreneurship can mix to create opportunities, as well as solve problems.

EcoCite's latest project is a proposed 25-unit EcoCondo to be constructed along the Rideau Canal in Ottawa.

The condos will be at least 50% more energy efficient than the country's strictest standards, Sweetnam-Holmes said.

The units will be built using safer materials that don't harm indoor air quality, as do the caulking, paints, construction adhesives and other products that are used by most builders today.

The green project's team will also work with as many recyclable building materials as possible, including recycled steel, or materials that are more sustainable. The units will have Australian toilets with a two-litre and a six-litre flush, "depending on what you need for a particular occasion."

In just over two weeks, EcoCite has already pre-sold 40% of the units.

Sweetnam-Holmes sees a great niche market opportunity in green development.

"The typical reaction when I talk to other builders is, 'Oh, people aren't interested in that,'" he said. "And then I always say, 'Well, have you asked them?'"



SWEETNAM-HOLMES
"Shocked"