

## Maine's top entrepreneurs: And the innovation awards go to ...

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By Dennis Hoey, Staff Writer

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PORTLAND - Hundreds of young business professionals gathered Wednesday in a restored 1850s church, with loud pop tunes playing and guitars being handed out, to recognize some of Greater Portland's most innovative entrepreneurs.

The third annual Entreverge awards ceremony at the Grace restaurant downtown was PROPEL's version of Hollywood's Oscar night, with five up-and-coming entrepreneurs getting recognition for their innovation and spirit.

About 500 people attended the event at the former Chestnut Street United Methodist Church.

PROPEL, which is affiliated with the Portland Regional Chamber, produced the event. PROPEL is a networking organization for young business professionals.

"This is our signature event," said April Ylvisaker, PROPEL's president and a financial adviser with Raymond James Associates in Portland. "The awards package is pretty insane."

Each winner received a brightly colored guitar. Becky McKinnell, owner of IBEC Creative, got a pink guitar. She said she has never played guitar, but might be inspired to learn.

Based in Portland, McKinnell's online marketing company has helped more than 200 businesses develop web strategies.

In addition to a guitar, each winner received a free membership to PROPEL and the Portland chamber, as well as consulting advice, signage and access to experienced entrepreneurs.

The formula appears to have worked for Rich Brooks, president of Portland-based Flyte New Media, a website design and social media consulting firm that he established several years ago.

Brooks was a 2010 Entreverge award winner.

"I am the oldest winner by far," said Brooks, who is 43. "And the most established company by a lot."

Despite Brooks' experience, Entreverge helped Flyte New Media by giving the company more exposure -- he appeared on a local television show -- and access to seasoned business consultants.

"If you are a brand-new company, this (award) can really help you," Brooks said.

There were more than 90 nominees for this year's awards. The 2011 winners included:

- Nick Friedman, owner and founder of Blue Reserve Water. Blue Reserve was founded in 2009 while Friedman and his partner, Brandon Pollock, were still seniors at Colby College in Waterville. Blue Reserve purifies tap water for businesses and homes, eliminating their dependence on bottled water.
- Dave and Morgan Surkin, owners of PortSports Social Club. Founded in 2008, PortSports' website provides a place for members to join sports leagues and participate in social events.

- Heather Chandler, president and founder of the Sunrise Guide. The guide is a handbook and coupon book with a mission of inspiring Mainers to pursue healthy and eco-friendly lifestyles.
- Jason Cianchette, owner and founder of Liquid Wireless. Its mission is to make it easier for marketers to advertise on mobile devices.

Wednesday's event was sponsored by the University of Southern Maine and by Powerpay.

<http://www.pressherald.com/news/and-the-innovation-awards-go-to-2011-06-16.html>