



The Wes Nicol Entrepreneurial Award

For Energrow, the Future Looks Bright

"If you're going to compete and win, you need a strategy."

Jasmin Hofer is talking about her love of mountain biking, but she could just as easily be referring to the effort she has put in to launching her own business. She approaches both challenges in much the same way: with careful planning, clear-eyed focus and enough raw passion to overcome the inevitable obstacles that stand between her and her goals.

Those ingredients helped Hofer win the 2007 Wes Nicol Entrepreneurial Award, an annual prize that recognizes the importance of the entrepreneurial spirit and its key role in the success of a business. Introduced in 1997, the award reflects the entrepreneurial passion of Wes Nicol, a successful Ottawa-based lawyer, residential developer, angel investor and philanthropist.

Looking back, Hofer says that the experience of competing in the Nicol Awards played an important role in the evolution of her business. Her company, Energrow, designs and builds small-scale vegetable oil production systems that enable farmers to extract maximum value from their crops while reducing feed and energy costs.

"I think what helped the most was the confidence I gained from having to get up in front of people who might not know anything about farming and present my business plan," Hofer explains. "I also developed a lot of great contacts during the competition process. Without the Nicol Awards, I probably wouldn't have come as far I have."

For Energrow, the future certainly looks bright. Born in Switzerland and raised on her family's farm in Newton, Ontario, Hofer got the idea for the business after visiting Europe and learning how farmers there were producing their own feed meal and renewable biofuel from oilseed crops. She initially considered importing European-built cold-press expellers into Canada, but abandoned that idea after realizing that they would require extensive modifications to suit the needs of Canadian farmers. Energrow subsequently designed its own vegetable-oil production system, which is scheduled to go on sale this spring. The company also provides conversion kits that allow diesel-powered tractors and generators to run on vegetable oil, enabling farmers to lower their energy costs.

A competitor by nature, Hofer is president of the University of Waterloo Cycling Club and races in provincial mountain bike events across the province. She also pursues yoga, strength training, running, hiking, snowshoeing and "almost any outdoor activity". This spring she graduates from the University of Waterloo with an Honours BA in German



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Applied Studies, with specialization in international trade, German communication and German cultural studies.

“I have a lot of energy, and cycling is a huge part of my life,” Hofer says. But whether the subject is sport or business, her philosophy is the same. “Everyone has a fair shot, but the people who consistently work the hardest and the smartest are the ones who deserve to win.”

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