



L – R: Mark Morrison, Scott A. Chappelle and William Hamilton were recently honored as part of the Michigan 50 Companies to Watch.

by Randy J. Stine.
Photo by Terri Shaver.

Michigan 50 Features Local Firms

At a time when business success stories are somewhat difficult to find, especially in Michigan, it's comforting to find a few exceptions. The Michigan 50 Companies to Watch list, sponsored in part by the Edward Lowe Foundation, a not-for-profit foundation with a mission to champion the entrepreneurial spirit in Michigan, celebrates the technical innovations and economic contributions of small to medium sized companies. Three mid-Michigan companies made this year's list.

Strathmore Development Company

For Scott Chappelle, president of Strathmore Development Company in East Lansing, and the 49 other entrepreneurs with companies named to the Michigan 50 Companies to Watch list, the selection comes as recognition after years of effort to grow their companies.

"The fact that we were chosen and being discussed in the same conver-

sations with premier companies in this state says a lot about our employees," Chappelle said.

Strathmore Development does virtually all aspects of real estate development. The firm, with its 75 employees, has successfully completed several shopping centers and office buildings, along with multi-family and traditional residential projects.

"We originate projects from the ground up and then oversee the projects until they are stabilized. Then we typically flip them to our investment partnerships," Chappelle explained.

Chappelle founded his company in 1997. He says Strathmore Development is unique because of its expertise in brownfield developments, which are sometimes avoided by other developers because of the difficult issues they typically face.

Brownfield developments are functionally obsolete, environmentally contaminated or blighted sites, Chappelle explained. As an example, Chappelle pointed to The Pointe, a redevelopment project located in a prominent location at Coolidge Road and Saginaw Street in East Lansing.

"That was a functionally obsolete building that sat virtually vacant for over a decade. We redeveloped the property to include a two-story general office building and neighborhood retail center," he said.

Brownfield state funding is designed to help developers afford the extra costs of working on old sites and is often combined with city credits and other tax credits—tax breaks that add up to thousands or millions of dollars, depending on the project's size.

With development projects across Michigan and in Florida, Chappelle

said his company remains committed to the mid-Michigan area. "This has been a very good market for us. The difficulty here is that you don't have people moving into the area, but this is our home," Chappelle added.

IDV Solutions

IDV Solutions of Grand Ledge, founded in 2004 by Mark Morrison and Ian Clemens, provides map-based data visualization by utilizing intuitive computerized mapping to display and analyze complex data sets.

"Estimates are that 80 to 90 percent of enterprise data has a geographic component. It could be a sales territory, a street address or a refinery location. We tie specific data to that area with a map through technology we call location feature server," said Morrison, IDV's CEO.

The technology is user friendly because "people are very familiar and comfortable with reading maps. People are very visual and don't always understand spreadsheets," Morrison said. "When you overlay relevant data on a map it becomes contextual and easier to understand."

IDV does work for major corporations and government agencies, including oil giant BP and the National Geospatial-

Intelligence Agency. The company even completed a security project for Super Bowl XL in Detroit in February. "We did a safety and security portal for the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency that mapped out perimeters for all of the events and downtown Detroit infrastructure. It gave security officials a better idea of potential areas of trouble," Morrison explained.

Morrison, says IDV, which has 15 employees, is honored to make the Michigan 50 Companies to Watch list. "This is really a reflection of the very bright people we have working with us. Everything starts with the people."

TechSmith Corporation

TechSmith Corporation, based in Okemos, provides screen capture and screen recording software used by companies, educational institutions, government agencies and home PC users. Its products help enrich personal computing by helping users demonstrate, observe and analyze complex ideas visually, rather than through words alone.

"Making this list will help us attract and hire the quality people we will need to continue to grow. It raises awareness of us statewide," said Bill Hamilton, president of TechSmith.

Hamilton founded the software development company in 1987. It has nearly 100 employees at its Okemos headquarters.

"Our screen capture utility allows users to capture information off the desktop and save it or e-mail it," Hamilton says. "For example, if you're on a Web page and want to save and e-mail it out you can capture, and save it."

Screen recording is a similar concept in that a customer can make a video of what is happening on the desktop. "That could be a Power Point presentation or a video of a talking head. Often it is used for training people in new software or in sales and marketing presentations," Hamilton added.

TechSmith will continue to focus its product development on the global workspace, Hamilton says, and specifically workers who collaborate on work projects from remote locations around the world. The company has current versions of its software in French, German, Korean and Japanese

"We will release several new products later this year that will aid people who collaborate on work projects from afar. They need to be able to share visual information," Hamilton stated.

The 2006 Michigan 50 Companies to Watch were honored in April at the Michigan Celebrates Small Business event, which is a joint effort of the Small Business Association of Michigan, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the Michigan Small Business & Technology Development Center and the Edward Lowe Foundation.

The award program is for second-stage entrepreneurs with six to 99 full-time equivalent employees and \$750,000 to \$50 million in gross annual sales. ■

