

THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY:
IAN EDWARDS CLS, NLS, Marystown, Newfoundland

In the small community of Marystown (pop. 5500), on Newfoundland's rural Burin Peninsula, a land surveyor with big ideas is the visionary behind two online data and asset management systems that have broken new digital ground in the province.

In 2007, when Ian Edwards learned he had won the very first David Thompson National Geomatics Award for Contributions to Society for his LandGazette geo-database project, he was blown away: "I felt like I'd received the Nobel Peace Prize for Geomatics in Canada!" he recalls.

With financial assistance from private investors as well as public funding, and with the help of co-workers at Edwards & Associates Ltd. and members of the Association of Newfoundland Land Surveyors, Edwards developed LandGazette through his company Information Brokerage Ltd. (IBL). LandGazette is a web-based database which enables Newfoundland land surveyors to deposit property surveys they have completed online in a centralized registry. Utility companies can also input and manage easements. The data can be accessed by end users on payment of a fee, shared between the land surveyor, the Association and IBL.

"End users can sign onto www.LandGazette.com and search for Newfoundland real property information by owner name, municipality, parcel identifier or graphical selection," says Edwards. Before LandGazette, he adds, researchers would have to wade through dusty print indices, microfilm and traditional bound archives in the Registry of Deeds in St. John's.

That was onerous enough; what made it even harder was the fact that the government of Newfoundland and Labrador doesn't require land titles to be registered and, unlike other provincial governments in Canada, doesn't manage any central cadastral mapping system.

“Searching for property information used to be like trying to complete a jigsaw puzzle with a whole lot of pieces missing,” observes Edwards. “It could really hold up progress on building projects. Now LandGazette is the official database for Association of Newfoundland Surveyors. The people using it are very, very happy with it. The advantages over traditional search means are just tremendous,” says Edwards.

Building on his experience in online management systems, in 2010 Edwards found himself once again on the list of David Thompson Geomatics Awards finalists. This time it was in not just one but two categories: Contribution to Society and Innovation in Geomatics. “Three or four years ago we decided to use IBL to design and build a regional online asset management system for municipalities, called RAMS. Any municipality in Canada can sign on and use the system to input zoning information, land use regulations and any other pertinent information, and use it to do asset valuation, track infrastructure use and maintenance, and so on. In Newfoundland, of course, they can also link LandGazette information into the management program as well.”

Despite these impressive IT achievements, Edwards doesn't confine himself to a keyboard. “Oh no,” he laughs. “We're doing our share of fieldwork, too. The company does a great deal of engineering surveying and consulting work. We've been working with Vale NL Ltd. on their mineral processing plant at Long Harbour, NL over the last couple of years, and doing quality assurance survey work for Nalcor Energy on their

Lower Churchill Project, for example, so have had to expand our crews. We also do offshore and satellite positioning surveys and navigation and hydrography work.”

Edwards worked for several years in the offshore oil and gas industry during his early career, but personally doesn’t miss the excitement of being out on the water. “That work is very interesting and the travel is great, but it’s nice to be able go home every night to my family these days,” he says. “Besides, a lot of it is standby work, and the time can get pretty long. What we’re doing here is never boring, and it keeps me very busy.”

Edwards says he is someone who needs to be busy, and with LandGazette, RAMS and all the other projects he has under his belt, he has his wish. Karate and gym workouts help relieve any stress from long days. In the meantime, he hopes to continue to expand LandGazette with underlying Crown title information, adding even more pieces back into Newfoundland and Labrador’s jigsaw puzzle of a cadastral map.

He’s proud of the award he and his colleagues received for LandGazette, but he’s even happier with how the online database is working out in practice. “Searching is so much easier now. So is quality control checking for pieces of infrastructure. That can save a lot of embarrassment. All this information at your fingertips—it’s simply worth its weight in gold.”