

Northwest Minnesota Foundation

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NEWS RELEASE

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Andy Wells Inducted into IDEA Hall of Fame

IDEA Competition partners inducted Andy Wells into the IDEA Hall of Fame on Wednesday, May 5 in Bemidji at the IDEA Competition Awards Banquet.

The *IDEA Hall of Fame* was instituted by IDEA Competition partners to recognize and honor the accomplishments of the region's legacy innovators—those within the region who have inspired others with their entrepreneurial vision, leadership and achievement.

Andy Wells is the epitome of an “idea man.” In 1989, he launched Wells Technology with an investment of \$1,300. Each year business grew, and in 2004 he began to work with the Fastenal Company to develop an SBA approved mentor-protégé agreement. With mentoring from Fastenal, Wells Technology expanded his workforce to 32 employees. Leading his company into major contracts for industrial supplies, he has been able to serve major corporations such as Coca-Cola, Tropicana, BAE Systems, General Dynamics, and Kraft Foods.

While Andy was growing his business, he also saw many social problems arising from unemployment and poverty in Northern Minnesota. With a desire to create jobs and employ economically disadvantaged people, Andy launched Wells Academy, a 501c3 non-profit school for industrial training. This apprenticeship program encourages positive-life values while providing marketable technical skills to economically disadvantaged employees.

Today, Wells Technology is still focused on serving customers and community. The Wells Technology manufacturing facility has grown to 32,000 square feet and produces over 12,000 different types of fasteners. Andy, a member of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, is a leader in his community through his roles on several local and state boards, community councils, economic development efforts, and as a mentor to other entrepreneurs. In 2009, he received the “Small Business Person of the Year” award from the Minnesota Small Business Administration and was personally congratulated by President Obama at the White House.

The IDEA Competition is a project of Ingenuity Frontier, a collaboration of partners joined by a common purpose — to grow the economy of Northwest Minnesota by outfitting the next generation of homegrown innovators for success in the global marketplace. IDEA sponsors are Bremer Banks of Crookston and Warren, Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation, the Northwest Minnesota Foundation, University of Minnesota, Crookston, 360° Center for Manufacturing and Applied Engineering Center of Excellence, and the Northwest Regional Small Business Development Center. IDEA was made possible through a generous grant from the Blandin Foundation.