

# Central Nova Profile

Mark Wood, president of Instrument Concepts Inc.

■ By Andrew Robinson

Mark Wood likes to think big. His company, Instrument Concepts, designed a listening device that helped prevent Thunder Horse, the world's largest semi-submersible oil platform, from sinking off the coast of New Orleans after it was caught in Hurricane Dennis. Surprising to many, the company's founder and president designed this instrument in the quiet community of Great Village. To find out how he manages to run an internationally renowned technology company in a town of 500, the Nova Scotia Business Journal spoke to Mark Wood in June.

**NSBJ:** What led you to found Instrument Concepts? Why keep an office in Central Nova Scotia?

**Mark Wood:** The company got its start in Texas, where we were living at the time. I had joined a dot-com company there in 1997 and soon figured out that the business wasn't going to work. I decided to start my own company based on more sound principles, but still with a focus on innovation. People using sensors were looking for someone to show them how to add value to their measurements using new technology. Thus Instrument Concepts was born. The Texas location provided a good base of poten-

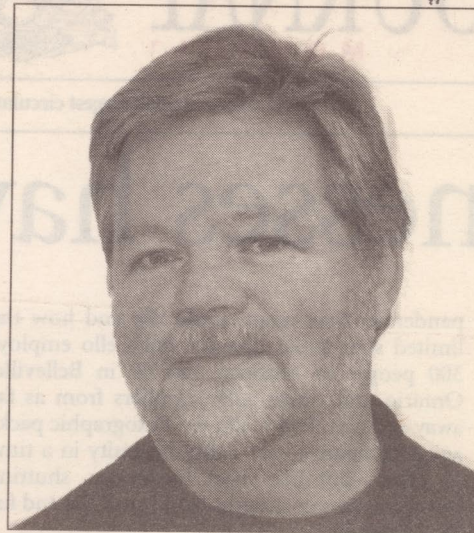
tial customers in the offshore energy industry, but I wanted my children to go to Canadian schools, and decided in 1999 to move the base home to Central Nova Scotia. I have kept the office in Texas, and customers seem to like the local access.

**NSBJ:** Do you feel any sort of push or pull to move all of your operations down south?

**Mark Wood:** It would be easier to do many things with Instrument Concepts if we were based in a busy place like Houston, or even Halifax. It's the lifestyle that keeps me here. In the future I may expand the Houston operation, but the priority right now is to grow our base here.

**NSBJ:** How much value do you place on research and development? Did your location present any challenges to this part of your business?

**Mark Wood:** The essence of what Instrument Concepts does is innovation, so we do a lot of research and development. Being located in a village near the Bay of Fundy is ideal for our marine-based work. A big challenge, though, is recruitment. The pool of potential employees within commuting distance is very small. That means anyone who decides to work here will need to relocate. This is a surprisingly big barrier, I'm finding



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**NSBJ:** You lived and worked in many different locations, such as Switzerland, England, and the U.S. How does Central Nova Scotia, as a business culture, differ from these places?

**Mark Wood:** In Central Nova Scotia, the pace is more human. You can still do business with a handshake. People seem to know each other here. We have some pretty smart, pro-active business people. I'd still like to see more non-

traditional business activity here, though.

**NSBJ:** Sometimes you design components that are rarely used except in certain emergency situations. With that said, how does it make you and your employees feel to know that your Big Ears listening device helped save the world's largest floating oil platform from capsizing?

**Mark Wood:** I saw a lot of worried faces when my tech and I arrived at Thunder Horse. It was exciting to be part of the 'aha' moment, helping them solve a very serious problem. But to be honest with you, I was just as relieved that our new instrument worked at sea for the first time without any hitches.

**NSBJ:** The Tory government in Nova Scotia has been talking a lot about promoting technological innovation here. What do you make of Nova Scotia's current technology sector?

**Mark Wood:** The province is doing a great job through Nova Scotia Business Inc. They've helped us exhibit at two trade shows that would have been difficult to do on our own. The fact that they've recognised the knowledge sector as a key part of Nova Scotia's future shows they're paying attention globally.

One of my concerns, though, is that our innovation companies often don't see each other as potential partners. Our province is too small for that. We need stronger partnerships between individual companies and learning centres like the universities and the innovation agencies.