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Smart hydrophones designed by Instrument Concepts look delicate for devices tough enough to survive in the ocean for months as they locate pinhole leaks in undersea pipes and monitor sounds made by approaching whales. That these slender devices, reminiscent of microphones, are made from ultra-durable titanium isn't surprising, but that they're created in Great Village, N.S., a tiny community on the Bay of Fundy, is unexpected. However, the bay and its lifestyle are what attracted inventor Mark Wood and his partner, Desiree Stockermans, to the area in the first place. "There are no traffic signals between my house and the office," says Wood, a New Brunswicker who began his career in medical electronics.

Famous for having the widest tidal range in the world, the Bay of Fundy was a powerful draw when Wood and Stockermans launched the company in 2000. "The bay clinched it," says Wood. "It provides 15 metres of water for us to test our instruments." Testing is crucial if the instruments are to withstand the harsh conditions deep in the world's oceans. The company sells its products internationally and also custom designs for clients that are mainly in the energy and environmental sectors. Technology developed for one industry is frequently adapted for use in another.

Standing in the lab that occupies the lower level of their two-storey building, Wood and Stockermans display one of their

instruments, the "bird"—a slim tube-like product that measures the Earth's magnetic field. Anomalies in the field may indicate a sunken ship or a mineral reserve. In addition to instruments, the company also develops software that models and simulates physical processes and electronic circuits for sensors and micro-controllers. "It's all about sound," says Wood. "Apart from music, humans are poor at processing sound, so our software presents sound visually in colours and shapes on a computer display so it's easy to understand."

The software engineers work upstairs in the building's airy loft. They're led by Sean Platnauer, one of two recent hires from abroad (Platnauer was recruited from England 18 months ago by the Colchester Regional Development Agency). Wood and Stockermans feel their company is on the cusp of big things. They won a 2010 Export Award from Nova Scotia Business Inc., and they plan to do more work in the environmental sector, on-site manufacturing, and increase sales and staff. "We've got more ideas than we've got time to work on right now," says Wood. ■



Mark Wood and
Desiree Stockermans

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