

Mining Sudbury's software expertise

Century Systems draws on local talent



Century Systems' software implementation team regularly travels the world, helping to set up sites in more than 43 countries around the world, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo. PHOTO SUPPLIED

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As the head of Century Systems Technologies Inc., an internationally successful mining software firm founded in Sudbury, Ray Auger embodies the trend of leaving to seek greener pastures only to discover that home may well be the greenest.

Having spent seven years seeking his fortune in the urban jungles of southern Ontario, Auger moved back to his hometown of Sudbury in the early 1990s to kick-start a simple IT consulting business.

Soon, Northern Ontario companies across a variety of industries made use of his services, including Inco, Sudbury Hydro and Domtar.

However, a hugely positive response following the creation of a drillhole data capture and management tool for Falconbridge led Auger to realize he might have a commercially viable product on his hands.

"It wasn't as if I was out there looking for this particular business," says Auger.

"It kinda found me."

He incorporated the company in 1996, and has since transformed the two-person enterprise into a 20-person firm with offices in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Hermosillo, Mexico.

The initial software product has evolved into a full menu of offerings, including a laboratory information management system, a mine mapping application, and a database management platform which centralizes information from the other programs. Most recently, the company released Report Manager, which automates the quality assurance and quality control process.

This ongoing success has allowed the seven members of Century Systems' implementation team to become seasoned global travelers

as the company's products are used in more than 150 sites in 43 countries.

"As we were growing, the ideas grew," says Auger.

Like many companies servicing the mining industry, Century Systems has seen its fair share of challenges in attracting staff, particularly as people with skills and knowledge relating to mining have become scarce.

However, by appealing to people from the North who want to live, work and play in the North, the company's workforce has grown by 25 per cent over the last year alone.

Auger takes pride in the fact that many of the company's 20 staffers are people who, much like himself, have returned to their local roots after casting out to see the world beyond the Big Nickel.

Greg Wicklander, the company's business development manager, is one such example, having left Sudbury to spend some time in the nation's capital before being drawn back.

Wicklander says one of the secrets of the company's success is through the strong word-of-mouth amongst the various international mining communities.

Another major reason for Century Systems' success can be summed up quite simply, says Luc Valade, a senior data analyst with long-time client FNX Mining: "I find the company has a deep respect for its userbase."

As an example, he points to an international user conference Century hosted in Sudbury in September 2008, where customers from around the world shared their concerns and learning experiences. The event brought in 60 people for three days of training and networking, and included a seminar on analytical quality control.

"We're very fortunate that they're always listening to us," says Valade. "We're seeing the benefits every day." ■