



Intelligencer file photo by Henry Bury

**Ed Lehtinen, president of Impacto Protective Products Inc., centre, won two major awards at the 5th Annual Business Achievement Awards last fall. Impacto captured the business of the year (25 employees and up) as well as the overall Business Excellence Award.**

vibration destroyed the nerves in the fingers and hands."

Lehtinen said these types of injuries don't happen overnight.

"It's cumulative trauma injuries and it's not reversible. So what you have to do is prevent the injury from getting to the point of incapacitating you."

Impacto's products are designed and made here to provide workers with protection from impact, vibration and repetitive strain.

There are gloves to protect workers' hands from vibration and impact, wrist supports to prevent repetitive motion injuries, anti-fatigue insoles, thermo wraps for the wrist, elbow, forearm, knee and back, as well as back supports to prevent those muscles from becoming strained from doing the same job every day.

In the past few years the company added knee pads, and this past December the firm acquired the rights to manufacture and distribute the patented Air Belt back support and other specialty products from Bruder Healthcare.

The company employs 35 people. About 20 are directly involved in the manufacture of the products during the single day-shift at the plant.

They are involved in cutting and sewing the products that are made of either leather, stretch fabric or special polymers. Gloves and back supports also incorporate inflated air bladders to absorb impact.

The company uses another 15 'home workers' who sew the pieces together for finishing at the plant.

Impacto has come a long way since its beginning. In late 2001, it was named the Business of the Year (for 25 employees and up) and received the Business Excellence Award during the 5th annual Business Achievement Awards gala.

The company sold \$250,000 worth of specialized protective equipment in its first full year of operation.

Sales for next year are expected to exceed \$6 million.

"We've had an average sales increase of 15 per cent over the past 15 years," Lehtinen said proudly.

Sixty per cent of its exports are to the United States while the rest is divided evenly between Canada, Europe and other countries.

Lehtinen said the largest growth potential is in Europe "because those countries are now becoming aware of those types of injuries and what our products can do to minimize the impact on workers."

Lehtinen feels there really is no end to the company's fortunes.

"No matter how automated the assembly is, there is always repetitive motion and therefore workers will need protection. And as more companies realize the need for these types of products, that should mean more business for us."