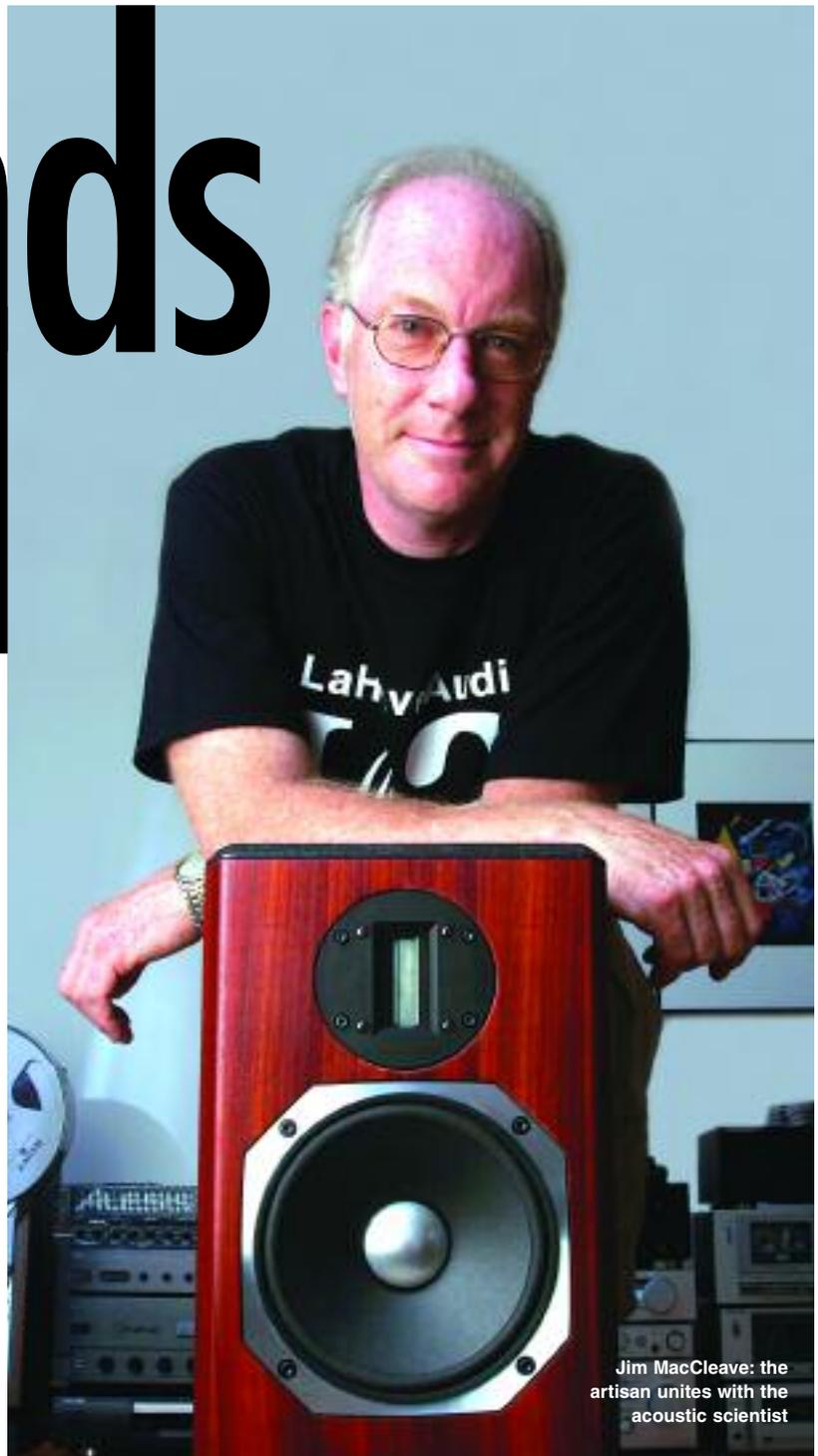


Sounds good

Building business relationships in Chicago means the chance to strike large deals and break open new U.S. markets

by JOE FITZGERALD



Jim MacCleave: the artisan unites with the acoustic scientist

for more than 25 years, LaHave Audio Products of Bridgewater has been designing and handcrafting speakers for discerning customers in Atlantic Canada. Company owner Jim MacCleave has a background in the craft of making fiddles, and when he made the crossover with electronic technology, the result was a world-class product.

Philippe Djokic, a music professor

at Dalhousie University, has compared LaHave Audio speakers to a Stradivarius violin, while concert-jazz pianist and composer Adam Makowicz evaluated his *Songs for Manhattan* CD recording on LaHave speakers and considers them to be the best around. LaHave Audio carefully crafts every aspect of its speakers, from the technical, electronic, and acoustic components to their physical design. That

meticulous attention is impressing more and more audiophiles.

“The sound quality and lack of distortion blew me away,” says Marek Roland-Mieszkowski, the president of Digital Recordings (www.digital-recordings.com) in Halifax, who has a PhD in physics with a major in acoustics. “When I tested them, it was one of the few times in my professional life that I was so impressed.” Roland-

Mieszkowski was eager to collaborate with MacCleave and LaHave Audio Products. “We usually distribute our own product, things like aids and tests for speech and hearing, tests for audio equipment, and software for audiometric testing,” he says, “but I thought LaHave’s product was so outstanding that I wanted to sell it worldwide.”

Ever since the artisan and the acoustic scientist joined forces, LaHave has been trying to break into the international market. In April of this year, Roland-

HEALTHFUL BENEFITS

The wild blueberry juice concept had been in Casey Van Dyk’s mind for quite some time, given his familiarity with blueberries and the success of blueberry juice as a health drink in Europe. This knowledge, coupled with the increased awareness of the potential health benefits of wild blueberries, resulted in the development of Van Dyk’s 100% Pure Wild Blueberry Juice.

Van Dyk’s Health Juice Products (www.vandykblueberries.ca) of Caledonia

helped the company enter a market it hadn’t considered before. “Initially, we were focused on the east coast of the U.S.,” says Randy MacDonald, the company’s business manager. “Other people in the industry had told me that the health-food market in the U.S. is bicoastal, meaning it’s California or the East Coast.”

MacDonald represented Van Dyk’s at the Chicago trade mission and praises the events staged by Team Canada Atlantic and the matchmaking that was facilitated



The clincher for Van Dyk’s came when MacDonald met with the regional buyer for U.S. health-food retailer Whole Foods

Mieszkowski attended a Chicago trade mission on behalf of LaHave Audio Products; he believes it significantly raised the profile of the company and its product. He spoke to five dealers in Chicago who expressed interest in the speakers. “It was great not only for networking with people on the U.S. side,” he says, “but we also made new connections with Canadian manufacturers. There were a lot of high-ranking people from government and various marketing agencies.” As a show of support, Nova Scotia Premier John Hamm was spotted sporting a LaHave T-shirt.

LaHave Audio Products was just one of an enterprising group of companies from Nova Scotia that stormed the bustling business environs of Chicago on that April trade mission, intent on establishing a beachhead for export trade to the U.S. Midwest and other lucrative markets throughout America. Among the Nova Scotia delegation were two other diverse companies—Van Dyk’s Health Juice Products Ltd. and Intelivote Systems Inc.—also on the cusp of growth and increased market share.

produces an all-natural, 100% pure wild blueberry juice made from locally grown berries. During the late 1960s, when the Van Dyk family became interested in developing a wild blueberry industry in Queens County, they bought fields from abandoned farms with as little as 10% wild blueberry coverage. Today these same fields are covered with at least 80% wild blueberry plants, and more growth is expected. They are the first commercially grown wild blueberries in the county.

The company spent the first two years doing research, in partnership with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and support from the National Research Council of Canada, on how to take frozen Grade A wild blueberries and produce a quality product high in antioxidants that also tastes good. After testing the juice in Halifax and getting a positive response, Van Dyk’s distribution and coverage has continued to grow across Canada and into the U.S. market.

The road to success in the American Midwest presented special challenges for Van Dyk’s. The trade mission to Chicago

by the mission’s organizers. “There were many events that enabled the whole networking thing between companies,” he says. The clincher for Van Dyk’s came when MacDonald met with the regional buyer for Whole Foods, the largest health-food retailer in the U.S. “The meeting was only possible because of Team Canada Atlantic synergies and the efforts of the match-making team.” Whole Foods’ flagship Canadian store is in Toronto, where Van Dyk’s sells its juice. The Midwest buyer was able to go online then and there, check Van Dyk’s Toronto sales, and decide the product would do well in the Midwest.

MacDonald stresses the importance of the Whole Foods meeting, pointing to the difficulty in getting an audience with such a sought-after major player. “In retrospect, the Midwest was a perfect opportunity for us,” he says. “I don’t think it’s targeted quite as heavily as the two coastal regions. I met with the right people through the trade mission, which showcased a professional presentation of Atlantic Canada. Those things came together for us.”

CALLING ALL VOTERS

Why change the way people vote? “Around the world, participation rates are dropping,” says Mike Pollard, the vice-president of marketing for Dartmouth, N.S.-based Intelivote Systems (www.intelivote.com). “Traditionally, older people like to go to the polls and cast a paper ballot, while younger people prefer using the Internet or their cellphones. You have to integrate them all or you disenfranchise parts of the population.” Intelivote is integrating the traditional voting method with the ability to vote by telephone, cellphone, Internet, or some PDAs.

Regardless of how many people show up for an election, electoral officers must gear up assuming that everyone who is eligible to vote will do so, which can be extremely expensive. As participation rates

given a strong mandate to run the government. Intelivote’s systems address the data-collection and reporting requirements for corporate surveys, opinion polls, and other activities that require mass participation, but the company’s main market is municipalities, which all face the issue of young voters not participating because the technology they prefer to use isn’t available to them.

The Chicago trade mission allowed Intelivote to scout the American market. “In that corridor to the Midwestern states, Chicago is the pre-eminent place to be,” says Pollard. “City officials are generally running everything for the state, not just the county, so we wanted to see what kind of an acceptance level or rejection level we would get.”

In the U.S., electronic voting is perceived as computer touch screens at polling sta-

people who were involved in the election process. It also angled for companies who knew the industry territory and were interested enough to market its product in the U.S. “I would say we were successful on all fronts,” says Pollard.

As for how the trade mission helped expand Intelivote’s unique market, Pollard asked the organizers to set up meetings with the Canadian consulate in Chicago to find out who the city’s electoral players were. “I got an e-mail back from the organizers in 10 minutes,” he says. “They’re excited to work with you if you’re excited to work with them.” Intelivote met with two representatives from companies it was wooing at the Taste of the Atlantic Dinner put on by the mission, and, despite the fact that they had travelled from far outside the Chicago core,

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go down, costs continue to escalate, causing the cost per voter to rise instead of fall. Other problems can crop up in the democratic system; for example, when participation rates are so low that a strong mandate is virtually impossible for winning candidates. “If you elect someone with 34% of the eligible voters showing up,” says Pollard, “50% of those voters only represent 17% of the electorate, and you don’t have any official mandate to be running a government.”

Intelivote studied those trends and decided that several steps were needed to improve the voting system. First, all eligible voters who don’t traditionally vote or who can’t vote needed to be addressed. Second, the cost of setting up polling stations and printing electoral lists needed to be reduced. Finally, winning candidates needed to be

tions, but that kind of technology doesn’t encourage eligible voters between 18 and 27 years of age to cast a ballot because they still have to go to the polling station—plus the computers are expensive. “If you decided not to go with electronic voting from a kiosk point of view and putting that equipment in those locations,” says Pollard, “with the cost you would save on that equipment alone, we could probably run your elections for the next 10 years.” That theory raised a lot of eyebrows in Chicago. Since Intelivote’s systems don’t require any capital equipment or monetary investment, the company bills its clients as a service and as part of the clients’ normal election costs.

While in Chicago, Intelivote arranged meetings with specific counties and met the

representatives stayed for two hours after the dinner. “The combination of high-profile speakers and beautiful venues automatically draws your market to you,” says Pollard. “If you can’t work a room like that, then you don’t deserve to be there.” ■

The Nova Scotia companies featured in this article were part of the Team Canada Atlantic Trade Mission, a partnership of ACOA, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Industry Canada, Foreign Affairs Canada, International Trade Canada, and the four Atlantic provinces. Team Canada Atlantic is committed to strengthening the trade-and-investment relationship between the U.S. and Atlantic Canada by organizing trade missions to the U.S. This was the first visit to Chicago. For more information, visit www.teamcanadaatlantic.com.