

Wawa Business Excellence Awards 2008
Tourism Pinnacle Award
Presented to: Naturally Superior Adventures

The Tourism Pinnacle Award recognizes a business, organization or person that has made an outstanding contribution to the growth of the area's tourism industry. The recipient has been innovative in developing a product or experience, promoting Wawa and Region, providing employment and exhibiting excellent customer service.

This year's recipient has met and exceeded all of the criteria for winning this award. This business was born in 1994 when David Wells purchased what has to be the most beautiful piece of real estate in the Wawa area. I must admit, that if that were my purchase, I may have been tempted to keep that gem to myself as my personal residence at the mouth of the Michipicoten River. But David had other plans.

Starting with the purchase of a large voyageur canoe and a few kayaks, David began to offer visitors and residents a connection to the both the history of this area and awesome spirit and beauty of Lake Superior. It was a definite struggle during the first few years. I remember having lunch with David on several occasions to discuss tourism related projects or marketing. When it came to the end of the lunch David would be known to use that famous line "sorry Lori, I must have forgot my wallet!"

But all of that aside, David made an important connection that many businesses never pursue. He decided that if he was going to grow his business, he needed to be part of larger group. He joined with fellow outfitters both in Northern Ontario as a member of PEAT (Partners in Eco-Adventure Tourism) and Paddling Ontario a consortium of

outfitters who bring their marketing dollars to the table to be matched by the Province of Ontario. This provides a much bigger presence for Ontario in competing with other international paddling destinations. At the same time, it provides a much larger presence for Naturally Superior Adventures. David's business began to see growth through these regional marketing efforts and gain much needed publicity through familiarization trips by many different media who visited his property.

With an eye on the bigger picture, David never lost site of the local community. He believes in Wawa and has always worked hard to purchase services locally, hire local talent and most of all promote his product and experience and make it accessible to the local community. His Rock Island Concert Series has grown to be a mainstay for many residents who enjoy hearing folk artists and other musicians who are passing through Wawa on a cross – Canada tour. These concerts support the local food bank. Most recently, David took it upon himself to organize local partners to create a website featuring three Wawa webcams. This project was coordinated and implemented all with local resources using partnerships with Superior East CFDC and Michipicoten High School staff and students.

David has been described in a recent Northern Ontario Business article as being "a disciple of guerrilla-style web marketing in appealing to his niche market." Truly he has embraced web marketing and has also grown his business by communicating with his customers through the internet. He has mastered search engine optimization and many of the techniques that put him in front of today's customer who is using the

internet almost exclusively to research their vacation experience or destination.

Naturally Superior Adventures is not only the best in Wawa, but one of the best in the world as an adventure outfitter. They have been rated by National Geographic Magazine among the top ten sea kayaking outfitters. This is a huge credit to the quality of experience, respect for the environment, customer service offered by Naturally Superior Adventures. At the same time, it is a huge credit to Wawa and is one more thing that puts us on the map.

The tourism industry has many positives for a community. It not only invites visitors into town to spend money in our local economy, but often improves the social and cultural fabric of the community and offers residents opportunities that would not otherwise exist. Naturally Superior Adventures is one of those tourism businesses that add to our community while providing a tourism product. For Wawa it is a product that brings in visitors that otherwise would not spend time and money here. He has diversified his business from strictly tripping on Lake Superior and now offers a wide array of programs directed at specialty markets. Everything from drumming workshops to women's only trips to photography workshops and art and wellness escapes.

David, congratulations on the success of your business Naturally Superior Adventures and its contribution to Wawa's tourism industry. It is my honour to present you with the 2008 Tourism Pinnacle Award.