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## Ingenuity Frontier News Spring/Summer 2009

### Edgar Hetteen Inducted Into IDEA Hall of Fame

CROOKSTON, MN -IDEA Competition partners inducted Edgar Hetteen into the IDEA Hall of Fame on Tuesday, May 12 in Crookston at the NMF Summit: Igniting Innovation.

The IDEA Competition finished its first year and awarded cash prizes to four up and coming innovators, but IDEA partners also recognized the importance of honoring the accomplishments of Northwest Minnesota's legacy innovators - those within the region who have inspired others with their entrepreneurial vision, leadership and achievement. To honor those outstanding individuals and their accomplishments, IDEA Competition partners instituted the IDEA Hall of Fame.

"Edgar Hetteen was an easy choice for our first inductee into the IDEA Hall of Fame," said Kari Howe, IDEA Partner and Economic Development Specialist for the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. "Edgar Hetteen is more than an inventor. He is more than an entrepreneur. His is a special blend of genius, guts and luck that legends are made of."



He never received a fancy college degree. In fact, after finishing the eighth grade, he left school and started working in his uncle's machine shop in Roseau. His bright mind and innovative spirit emerged early on. At the young age of 34, he co-founded Polaris Industries. The rest, as they say, is history - but history that forever changed the economy of Northwest Minnesota.

Here are some of the major events of his life:

- 1920 - Born in Roseau, Minnesota.
- 1944 - Opens company that eventually becomes Polaris Industries.
- 1955 - Polaris begins building snowmobiles.
- 1960 - Snowmobiles 1,200 miles across Alaska to prove snowmobiles can work. Later that year, he leaves Polaris.
- 1961 - Founds Arctic Enterprises in Thief River Falls.
- 1962 - Designs Arctic Cat 100.
- 1965 - Sells Arctic Enterprises.
- 1967 - Returns to Arctic Enterprises as Vice President.
- 1983 - Founds ASV, Inc., in Marcell, Minnesota.
- 1998 - Forbes names ASV 14th-best small company in America.

Entrepreneurs start businesses, but Edgar Hetteen founded an industry, and created a market for something that people never knew they needed - the snowmobile.

The IDEA Competition is a project of Ingenuity Frontier, a collaboration of partners joined by a common purpose – to grow the economy of Northwest Minnesota by outfitting the next generation of homegrown innovators for success in the global marketplace.

Due to his advanced age, Edgar was not able to travel to Crookston to accept the award, but his son, Ronn Hetteen, accepted the award on his behalf and made a few comments. “Dad was a remarkable man,” Ronn said. “When you think back over the years, it’s hard to believe all that he has done and accomplished in his lifetime...we are honored to accept the award on his behalf.”

IDEA sponsors are Bremer Banks of Crookston and Warren, First National Bank, Mahnomon, the Northwest Minnesota Foundation, University of Minnesota, Crookston, 360° Center for Manufacturing and Applied Engineering Center of Excellence and the Northwest Regional Small Business Development Center. IDEA was made possible through a generous grant from the Blandin Foundation. For more information, visit the IDEA website: [www.ideacompetition.org](http://www.ideacompetition.org).

The economic impact Edgar has had on northern Minnesota is hard to fathom. To measure that impact, you would have to add together tourism revenue, snowmobile sales, sales taxes revenues, and all the wages paid to people employed in the manufacturing of snowmobiles.

Edgar has always been a relentless “idea man,” continually searching for ways to promote and to improve the performance of the vehicle he helped create. His ideas have led to many important developments, which are standards of the sport today. Some of his innovations include breakthrough ideas like slide rail suspension, the aluminum chassis, the forward-mounted engine and a multitude of other innovations which continue to define the snowmobile to this day.

His accomplishments belie his humble origins. He was

the son of first generation Swedish immigrants and grew up on his family's 80-acre homestead south of Roseau, Minnesota. As a young boy he milked cows, fed the family livestock and developed a lifelong infatuation with mechanical equipment.

## 2009 IDEA Winners Announced

CROOKSTON, MINN. - The IDEA Competition announced its four winners May 12 in Crookston at the Northwest Minnesota Foundation Summit: Igniting Innovation.

The four winners are the forte Keyboard Company, IceHogger Industries, Ultralight Soaring Aviation, and Xtreme DnA. Each winner will receive \$10,000 in cash to advance their business idea, plus up to an additional \$10,000 of specialized technical assistance.

The forte Keyboard Company, owned by Eric Thorsgard and located in Bemidji, will be launching two new keyboard instruments - the forte and condensed keyboards. These keyboards will offer an alternative to people who want to play an instrument that is easier to learn than the piano. Although they can play anything written for the piano, they are completely new instruments because of the innovative configuration of the keys. The company plans to manufacture and market these keyboards for the purpose of music education, enjoyment and performance.

Ultralight Soaring Aviation, Inc, owned by David and



*L to R: Nancy Vyskocil, President Northwest Minnesota Foundation (sponsor), Don Zejdlik, Adam Zejdlik, Xtreme DnA (winners), Rob Jacobson, President, Bremer Bank Crookston (sponsor), Karen White, Executive Director, 360 Manufacturing and Applied Engineering Center of Excellence (sponsor), Rick Kezar, Eric Thorsgard, Forte Music Keyboards (winners), Todd Hamm, Ice Hogger Industries (winner), David Ekstrom, Ultralight Soaring Aviation (winner).*

Their system, called the "Missing Link" is designed to be placed onto a small snowboard, giving it a greater side cut, reducing cross-torsional flex, stiffening the board, and giving the rider more control. The innovative design allows snowboarders to reach speeds impossible on a normal snowboard. The Missing Link also reduces the amount of effort it takes to control the snowboard, meaning the rider will not tire as quickly, and can spend more time out on the slopes.

Project Coordinator, Michelle Landsverk was very pleased with the results of the competition. "To have four winners of this caliber is very rewarding to those of us who have taken this competition from concept to reality," Landsverk said. "The 2009 competition may be over, but the 2010 competition opens in September of this year. We encourage Northwest Minnesota innovators to consider entering the next round of competition."

For more information, visit the IDEA website:

Bonnie Ekstrom, is located in Bemidji, MN. The company is launching the StartStick, a cost effective, light weight, self-contained energy pack, which provides all the power needed to start 4-8 cylinder piston engine aircraft. The StartStick is designed to be plugged into the auxiliary power jack on aircraft, and will be available in several configurations, including 12VDC and 24VDC designs. The StartStick can be quickly recharged and is made from fully recyclable parts.

[www.ideacompetition.org](http://www.ideacompetition.org).

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IceHogger Industries, owned by Todd Hamm and located in Bagley, has created a product called the Ice Auger Shroud System for ice fishing. The product is designed as an accessory for power ice augers. The purpose of the system is to control ice chips, slush and water during the drilling process to minimize or eliminate clean-up after drilling. The result is a quicker set-up with less effort. The Shroud also provides the operator protection from rotating parts and flying debris during operation and acts as a protective barrier from the sharp drill flighting during transport.

Xtreme DnA, East Grand Forks, MN, owned by Don and Adam Zejdlik, is located in East Grand Forks. Xtreme DnA has developed a snowboard system that focuses on the need for speed with control.

#### **Who is Ingenuity Frontier?**

Ingenuity Frontier is a collaborative project of the Northwest Minnesota Foundation, Bemidji State University, Headwaters Regional Development Commission, Northland Community and Technical College and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. These partners are working collaboratively to increase the pool of manufacturing and engineering talent in northwest Minnesota, promote a local culture of innovation and

brand the region as a hub of engineering talent and innovation.

**For more information call the Northwest Minnesota Foundation: 1-800-659-78599**

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