

entrepreneur of the year



THE CLOSER

NAME: J.P. DEVEAU  
 COMPANY: ACADIAN SEAPLANTS  
 BUSINESS: SPECIALTY SEAWEED PRODUCTS  
 2011 EOY CATEGORY: HEALTH SCIENCES

# J.P. Deveau

**J**ean-Paul Deveau—J.P. to his friends—has been successfully running one of the most complex and scientifically savvy businesses in Nova Scotia for the last 10 years. Acadian Seaplants Limited (ASL) operates processing facilities in Pennfield, N.B., Miminegash, P.E.I., and in Yarmouth and Cornwallis, N.S., along with a state-of-the-art research facility with nine PhD scientists among its 300 employees in eight countries, international marketing and sales staff serving 70 countries, and the world's largest commercial land-based seaweed cultivation facility. It's a business that generates more than \$35 million in sales annually by creating a multi-faceted industry where none existed before.

ASL is a long way from the Deveau family's humble beginnings on the Acadian French shore of Nova Scotia's Digby County. Deveau's grandfather used the seaweed that grew along the shore's of Nova Scotia's Baie Sainte Marie to fertilize the family's gardens, a practice the family's Acadian ancestors had followed for generations. Deveau's father, Louis, took it a step further by founding Acadian Seaplants in 1981 to market seaweed fertilizers around the world, creating a new industry in the process. Deveau joined the company in 1986, fresh from McGill University where he graduated with an MBA. Louis' first office was Deveau's childhood bedroom in the family home that his father had converted into the company's headquarters.

Over the next 30 years, ASL grew steadily from a supplier of bulk seaweed to become the largest and most diversified producer of seaweed-based specialty products on the planet, turning over 40,000 metric tonnes of seaweed every year into value-added products such as fertilizers, agri-chemical products, animal-feed additives, and health, beauty, and food ingredients. In 2001 Deveau was named company president. "There's no question I enjoy a challenge," he says. "I like hard work, and I've enjoyed building this business to where it is now."

Similarly for Deveau, his recent stint chairing the 2011 Canada Winter Games had a few family connections. The only boy in a family of five, Deveau had watched all four of his sisters compete at Canada Games in swimming. An avid skier, he's one of the highest-ranked ski instructors for physically challenged people in the province, specializing in teaching those with mobility problems.

For Deveau, joining his father in business remains his most significant triumph. He recalls that together they decided to launch an ambitious new product line. "I remember the very first customer we clinched," he says. "With nothing to work with, I managed to convince them to buy a brand-new product from us. It gave us the start we needed." — TOM MASON



**What did you want to be when you grew up?** I had no idea. I think this is a challenge for people. Sometimes it only shows up later in life. **What's your personality type?** Ha! You probably should ask somebody else. **What would you describe as your best strength?** I always want to get the job done. There is always a way to get to the goal. I guess you would say I am pretty driven. **Your weakness?** Sometimes I bulldoze a little too hard to get the job done. **What was your defining moment as an entrepreneur?** It was not that entrepreneurial. Although I was trained as an engineer, my first job was with Esso as an industrial salesman. It's when I did my first "deal." I loved it. I knew I wanted to be in business from

that point. **What was your biggest mistake?** Under-hiring for specific positions. That is, thinking we couldn't afford to pay more and settling for a lower level of individual. We don't make that mistake anymore. **What is the best thing about doing business from this region?** By far the best thing about doing business from Atlantic Canada is the quality of the people available to us. What is the toughest? I can't think of anything. I can't think of a better place to be. **Did you ever think you might lose everything you'd worked for?** Our company is quite seasonal. Therefore, at times we push the limits of our operating line with our bank. In some years it has been very, very tight. But we always found a way to make it work. **Who is your most valuable business mentor?** My father. Such an easy question. He has been extremely valuable mentoring me and still is. **For you, what**

**is progress?** Always moving forward. I can be patient if we aren't meeting our goals if we're making progress and I can see it's going to happen. If there's no progress, I'm not very patient. **What do you do in your spare time?** I just chaired the 2011 Canada Winter Games. It was a privilege and an honour, and I learned so much. In my spare time I teach skiing for people with disabilities. **What is your most treasured possession?** My time. **Who would play you in a movie?** I have no idea, but I have been told that I look like the president of Iran. Maybe I could play him? **Words to live by?** Treat people the way you want to be treated. It's amazing how well that works. **How are you different today than when you started in business?** When I was a newly minted MBA, I knew everything. Now 25 years later, it's amazing how much more I have to learn. ☺