

# Opening doors in the IT profession

by Heidi Riley

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

**A**let Pieterse has faced a number of barriers in her career. She chose to work in the male-dominated industry of Information Technology, and she encountered a new culture and business environment when she moved to Canada. But she has managed to persevere and turn closed doors into new opportunities.

Alet is the president of **Web Site Advantage**, an IT company she started ten years ago in O'Leary. She was born in South Africa, and earned an MSc in Computer Science at the University of Pretoria. "The stereotype of an IT job is working at a computer in a room by yourself, and I wanted more social contact," says Alet. "I became a Lecturer at the university at the age of 21. For eight years I taught classes that were often all male students."

## Changing gears

"I left the university to become a **Project Manager** at a Geographic Information Systems software development company. I had eight male programmers on my team, and had no problems relating to them."

"In 1991, I met my future husband, a potato farmer. I moved from Pretoria, a city of one million people, to a farm in rural South Africa. I started an IT training facility at the farm, and offered a variety of software training courses to farmers, agricultural companies, professional service companies and mining companies in the area. In 1996, we packed up our two small children, aged 19 months and three weeks, and moved to Canada. I closed my eyes and made the jump to a different climate and culture in O'Leary PEI."

## Networking

As Alet balanced family and work, she tried a number of different options. She started a web development company with a software training component, and began networking with ITAP (**Innovation and Technology Association of PEI**). "The connections I made through the ITAP Board and the **PEI Business Women's Association** helped me to meet other business people and to understand how business is done on PEI, and I never felt a bias against me as a woman."

## Staffing the company

The team at Web Site Advantage includes Alet's husband **Lukie**, who is the **Researcher and Content Developer**. He also runs **Global Potato News**, an Internet portal. The staff also includes an **Office Administrator**, a **Web Designer**, and a **Web Programmer Analyst** who works from his home in Vancouver, BC.

## Developing a new field

"I love a challenge," says Alet. "After developing websites for 10 years, I wanted to take web development to the next level. We developed a web-based tracking system for potatoes which records in real time details such as what field the potatoes come from and what chemicals were used, and follows potatoes through the packing plants to where the orders are shipped to retailers. We are now developing a similar system for a PEI potato producer."

## Advice for women in IT

"Women have many characteristics that make them good candidates for the IT field," says Alet. "We are good at listening to clients, we pay attention to details, we have great organizational skills, and our end product is often better tested. If you know what you're talking about and stick to your strengths, you will be respected as a woman."

"I've been told that I'm more aggressive and demonstrative than what Islanders are used to. I have learned to dance a slow dance, be patient, step back and give people a chance to mull over what I have to say. I know that to be successful in business, you need to communicate and connect."

"I didn't grow up here, and I had to start from scratch. Many of my clients are involved in agricultural, industrial and manufacturing activities, and 99.9 percent of them are male. It was hard starting out, but I gained credibility and it got easier. If I can do it against all odds, you can do it too."



**Alet Pieterse, president of Web Site Advantage, spoke at a professional development luncheon held by the Canadian Information Processing Society of PEI. In the audience were co-op students from Holland College and UPEI, and employees from many of PEI's IT companies, including DeltaWare Systems.**

For more information about Web Site Advantage, visit [www.wsadvantage.com](http://www.wsadvantage.com)

For more information about Global Potato News, visit [www.potatonews.com](http://www.potatonews.com)

For more information about the Canadian Information Processing Society of PEI, visit [www.cips.ca](http://www.cips.ca)

For more information about the Innovation and Technology Association of PEI, visit [www.itap.ca](http://www.itap.ca)

# Game design competition leads to employment

by Heidi Riley

VIDEO GAMING



**A** national competition called **GameGarage** held last year picked a team of game design and animation students who would take a video game from concept to market-ready prototype.

The winning team received technical and financial support from the **PEI Interactive Media Alliance** to developing their video game. They spent four months at the **Atlantic Technology Centre (ATC)** in Charlottetown working on their project. They have finished a prototype of their game, called *Kingdom of Gnester*. All five have gone on to employment at video game development companies on PEI.



Nick McKinnon

**Nick McKinnon** was part of a team of five students from the **New Brunswick Community College-Miramichi Campus** who were chosen to develop their game concept. Nick is now working as a **Programmer** for **Telos Productions Inc.** "It's hard to break into the video game industry," says Nick. "If it wasn't for the GameGarage contest, I wouldn't have been given this opportunity."

## What does it take to work in video games?

A variety of jobs are available in the video game industry, including **2-D and 3-D Video Game Artists, Computer Programmers, Production Staff, and Game Designers.**

"There is a huge need for more **Programmers**," says Nick. Programmers need to truly love gaming, they need to have a lot of patience, and they should be good at problem solving when running into roadblocks.

"I really love programming," says Nick. "I take the artwork and bring it to life. It's a very satisfying feeling to make the characters move and make the game work. Even though it takes a long time, the finished product makes all the headaches worthwhile!"

## How do you get started?

"If you think you may be interested in programming, try working with a program called **Microsoft XNA** that you can download for free," says Nick. "It has the tools to help you develop a video game. It will give you a taste of what working in this field is all about before you spend the time and money to get the training."

Video game development programs are available at Holland College and at UPEI.

For more information about **GameGarage**, visit <http://imagamegarage.blogspot.com>

For more information about **Telos Productions Inc.**, visit [www.telosentertainment.com](http://www.telosentertainment.com)

For more information about the **Interactive Media Alliance** and other players in PEI's video game industry, visit [www.gameplan.ca](http://www.gameplan.ca)