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[Small Okanagan high tech firm making its way](#)

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor

I attended the Okanagan Science and Technology Council's (OSTEC) second annual Christmas social last week at the Kelowna Curling Club.

Once again Margret Horvath and the OSTEC team did an outstanding job of organizing this event.

Every year there is a growing number of vibrant high technology companies that have chosen to make the Okanagan their home.

Each of these companies has an interesting story to tell. For example, take my conversation with Kathleen Wallace, vice-president of SkyTrac Systems Ltd. (www.skytrac.ca).

Wallace and I had a great conversation where she passionately described her journey to joining SkyTrac.

"I was initially involved on a consulting basis in performing a market research contract for the company's GPS products.

The market research convinced me that there was a large and growing market opportunity for SkyTrac's products so I joined the company."

After talking with Wallace for any length of time you realize that her enthusiasm is contagious.

"We are the global leader in automated flight following. Our systems provide two-way messaging between air and ground and enable the transmission of critical information," she says.

"For instance, our systems were on board when Pilot Sean Loutitt, of Kenn Borek Air based in Calgary, Alberta, flew the 16-hour round trip to the South Pole and back to Chile to rescue a researcher from the United States' research station at the South Pole.

"It was the third such rescue in four years and occurred in complete darkness.



SkyTrac Systems Ltd. is a growing Okanagan high tech company that has developed automatic flight tracking navigation software for airplanes and helicopters.
Contributed

“Our system was used to track their location all of the way. With a 900-mile, five-hour flight across open ocean to Punta Arenas, at the southern tip of Chile, they needed to know where the plane was at all times.”

Wallace indicated that initially her brother was involved with the company so that is why it was located in Penticton.

They could have located anywhere in the world but he wanted the lifestyle that the Okanagan offers.

“Like any company that is located in a smaller center, we have challenges but nothing that can’t be overcome,” she said.

Wallace was very clear on what their value was to their customer base, why they buy from them and what sets their solution apart from a technical viewpoint.

“We have a unique position in the marketplace as larger, more complex solutions are too expensive for the small- to medium-sized operator to purchase.

“We definitely fulfill a growing market need.”

When asked about the potential of the company, Wallace was again enthusiastic.

“We absolutely see continued growth in this marketplace. With our FlightTrac software we have been able to transmit GPS location and other mission critical data from the aircraft via Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites to any Internet accessible location in the world.

“In fact, our coverage around the globe is seamless. With our SkyTrac system hardware being Transport Canada and FAA approved, we do believe, pardon the pun, that the sky is the limit.”

Wallace is helping to lead the company into the future and thoroughly enjoys the day to day challenges that running a technology company brings.

“We are small but growing very quickly. We will be successful by staying focused on our customers, developing them into raving fans and managing our growth.

“I also appreciate the opportunity to be involved on the OSTE board as I have lots of ideas for growing the technology base in the Okanagan.”

“I always enjoy asking business leaders about what they would change about their company, if they had the choice.

“I wouldn’t change anything at the moment. I am having the time of my life.”

From my perspective, the Okanagan is the place to locate any company—technology or otherwise.

Yes we do have our issues, but the Okanagan has many advantages, from the ability to balance your life to one of the lowest cost structures in North America.

I think that Wallace summed it up the best when she said, "What better opportunity is there to do something that you are passionate about and live in the Okanagan doing it? You just can't beat that."

I couldn't agree more – it truly is a privilege to work and play in the Silicon Vineyard.

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