

Marketing is close to home at ICON



DAVID PARKER
AROUND TOWN

As I checked out the Calgary finalists for the Alberta Chamber of Commerce Awards of Distinction, I noticed that three of the four in the marketing category are from Calgary. Noticing the campaign for ICON Stone and Tile was produced in-house, I took that as my opportunity to pay a visit and see the full presentation.

It's great marketing and was indeed produced within the company. Marketing manager **Sophie Belanger** was an experienced graphic designer in the Montreal agency community and a vice-president of marketing for a stone company before moving to Calgary with her husband and ICON owner, president **Jean St-Onge**.

St-Onge was born in the Gaspé coast region of Quebec and earned his business degree at Laval University in Quebec City. He started his career with a natural stone trader in that city working in quality control and sales that took him to Italy, China, Brazil, India, Turkey and South Africa searching quarries for the latest in products and rare natural stone.

He rose to the position of marketing and operations manager, but left after seven years to join Polycor, a much larger company, where he was appointed president of a subsidiary that had three manufacturing plants.

After another six years of travel and sourcing and selling other people's products, he felt it was time to start his own company and researched to find the city with the best potential.

He and his wife and family moved to Calgary in 2006, found a building just east of Macleod Trail on 36th Avenue S.E. and opened for business in July of that year.

St-Onge launched ICON by investing in the facility, equipment, inventory, a good business plan and the belief that he was going to be hugely successful.

He had to encourage his first employees to move from Quebec as skilled workers were hard to find here. By the time his machinery had arrived, he already had orders from builders and contractors. Progress has been all the



Stuart Gradon, Calgary Herald

Sophie Belanger and Jean St-Onge of ICON Stone and Tile, which is a finalist for a provincewide marketing award.

he expected, with 2009 even being a good year despite the tough economy.

Today, he has 28 employees in the office/showroom, plant and company installation crews. The building space has increased to 19,000 square feet, which includes a large 2,500-square-foot showroom that displays his stone and tile products and a collection of his own brand of faucets imported from Italy.

St-Onge and Belanger have done well in their adopted city and as well as planning to increase the variety of products and services here, they've set their sights on expanding into B.C.