

Top award for two North businessmen

By **Iain Laing**

TWO businessmen whose companies have enjoyed immense success in the last 12 months have been honoured by members of the Entrepreneurs' Forum.

Ian Baggett, managing director of property consultants Adderstone Group, and Matthew James, chairman and managing director of UK Biometrics, won the Entrepreneur and Young Entrepreneur of the Year accolades.

The awards, which recognise the people Entrepreneurs' Forum members considered to have been the most inspirational and successful in the region in the last year, were presented at the Forum's annual conference in Gateshead.

Ian's Newcastle-based company is one of the fastest growing in the North-East, recording growth of 160% in the last year.

Handing over the award, Mark Hatton, of sponsor Ernst & Young, said: "Ian started the company with a small financial windfall and built it up into

something much, much bigger. He has seemingly limitless levels of energy, determination and passion."

Ian said: "This award has been earned by the people who work around me and it's the first business award I have ever received from my peers."

Matthew started his business in 2000 with a small office, minimal capital, a telephone and a laptop. By 2004, he had funded growth from profit, begun to recruit his management team and formed UK Biometrics Ltd. Their plans are for a business which will turnover in excess of £100m by 2010.

Mark Hatton said: "Matthew has impressed everyone who has met him over the past year. He is someone with a great business idea and a winning combination of technical, commercial and managerial skills. His products have huge potential to touch all our lives."

On receiving his award, Matthew said: "The North-East has got a fantastic en-

trepreneurial spirit. I feel I am still so young and green in business and the other members of the Forum inspire me and make me more determined than ever going forward."

Carole Beverley, chief executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, said: "These two awards, which are the only ones given by the Forum each year, are always cherished by the winners because they know they have been nominated by their fellow members."

"The recipients say that being recognised by your peers for your achievements is a humbling experience and consequently the awards mean so much more to them."

Previous winners of the prestigious accolades are John Hays, founder of Sunderland-based Hays Travel; Steven Bell, hotelier, retailer and the owner of a top end shop-fitting company; and Mike Browne of ScS furniture retail chain. The inaugural Young Entrepreneur of the Year award was won last year by Tarek Nseir of TH_NK.



FORUM'S CHOICE: Top, Matthew James, and, above, Ian Baggett.