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### **John Sweeney : Distinguished Achievement Award - Business**

St. Norbert College

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# 2005 Distinguished Achievement Award - Business

## John Sweeney '88

Most of us worry that our children will finish college and, instead of getting a “real” job, will join a garage band or try Hollywood before coming to their senses and settling down to a more “normal” career in teaching, business, etc. On the flip side of this all-too-familiar scenario is John Sweeney’s story. After graduating from St. Norbert College in 1988, John built a very successful career in corporate real estate. Then, suddenly – as it must have appeared to his friends, colleagues and family – he left it all in 1993 to pursue a full-time career as an actor and improviser.

Now a successful improv actor and comedic writer, John has developed another business – that of making people laugh, motivating people in the business world to think and act more creatively, and to develop more innovative leaders, teams and work environments.

In 1997, John and his wife, Jenni, purchased the Brave New Workshop Comedy Theatre (BNW), founded in 1958 by Dudley Riggs, and the oldest satirical comedy theatre in America. Since then, BNW has become a multi-million dollar company and grown from five to 45 employees. John and Jenni also created the Brave New Institute, an improvisational training center that currently teaches over 280 students. John copyrighted the show creation process that BNW used, refined the role of improvisation in idea generation and developed an entire corporate training curriculum based on the principles and philosophies of improvisational theatre.

As a result, BNW’s corporate training has grown ten-fold over the last four years, teaching clients as varied as Cargill, Disney Cruise Lines, General Mills, Hewlett Packard, Mayo Clinic, Minnesota Timberwolves, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Texas Instruments, 3M and Wells Fargo, as well as numerous colleges and universities.

John himself has performed over 1500 live shows for BNW and Second City Communications in Chicago; more than 500 corporate shows, which included over 50 performances for Fortune 100 companies; and he has created and produced over 300 training workshops for organizations around the globe – all while serving as executive producer for BNW Theatre productions in the Twin Cities, directing many performances at BNW’s venues and leading the corporate services division.

In April 2005, John published his first book, *Innovation at the Speed of Laughter: 8 Secrets to World Class Idea Generation*, to help corporations and their leaders turn employees into idea factories. John and his book were selected to be part of the prestigious Microsoft 2005 visiting author series. It is now in its third printing. In September of this year, his second book will be published. *The Art of the Laugh: A Handbook for Sketch Writers, Actors and Directors* details the comedy sketch writing process that the BNW has employed for nearly 50 years.

As John accepts the Distinguished Achievement Award in business, we can be confident that his acceptance speech will be improvised and good for more than a few chuckles. Right, John?!

## St. Norbert College

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