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EXPORT TRAILBLAZERS RECOGNIZED

Alma Farias, owner of Trade Partners and Ontario Representative for TFO Canada, is this year's recipient of the JoAnna Townsend Excellence Award for Leadership in International Trade, presented at the Organization of Women in International Trade (OWIT) – Toronto Annual Awards Gala. The award recognizes an outstanding woman in Ontario who, through her business and personal networks, creates opportunities to actively support Canadian women-owned businesses in expanding globally and succeeding in the international marketplace. Farias has been a tireless advocate in promoting trade between Canada and developing and emerging economy countries by encouraging Canadian business to export and import in these regions. She also generously shares her knowledge and experience and serves as a role model for young women entering the international field.

"I am greatly humbled and honoured to be the winner of the JoAnna Townsend Excellence Award this year," said Farias, who emigrated to Canada from Monterrey, Mexico, and is passionate about promoting trade between Canada and the Global South. "I am grateful especially knowing that I work every day with extraordinary women who are equally deserving. When everyone talks about a global economy, that is my world. I'm on the frontlines, helping companies—and especially women—to open doors to international trade through the TFO Canada."

OWIT-Toronto launched the award several years ago in memory of **JoAnna Townsend** of the Department of Foreign Affairs & International Trade (DFAIT) - a trailblazing champion of women exporters who died in 2004 after a courageous battle with cancer.

Diana Pitsolis, President & CEO of Spongezz, clinched OWIT-Toronto's Woman Exporter Award, which recognizes an Ontario woman entrepreneur who exports to more than one international market. Through her success, she advances the image of Canadian women in the international business community. Spongezz has been in business since 1994, exporting products to eight countries, with the U.S. being the largest market. Pitsolis has doubled her business in the past seven years through the development of new products and by reconfiguring business practices. Through her endless pursuit of new business and her enjoyment of talking and meeting new people around the world, she has definitely made an impact in raising awareness of Canadian women in business.

Winner of the Student of the Year Award is **Laura McLeod** who participated in the U.S. Commercial Service Internship Program at the U.S. Consulate General in Toronto in 2013 with consistently outstanding results. McLeod has also been an active participant and volunteer in the local Hispanic business community and currently utilizes her international business skills in a customer service role at Innovative Vision Marketing Inc.

Other highlights of the Awards evening included keynote speaker **Janice McDonald**, President of the OWIT-Ottawa Chapter. McDonald shared the best business lessons she learned at an early age, from delivering newspapers door to door through to selling chocolates. She urged attendees to not only find a mentor, but also to be a mentor. “Mentoring is critical,” she said. “Network with experienced women, and also see who you can help out. The move from mentorship to sponsorship can be a game changer.”

The 10th Annual Gala Dinner & Awards Program was sponsored by **Export Development Canada, TELUS, Bennett Jones LLP, Crowe Soberman LLP** and the **Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development**.

About OWIT

The *Organization of Women in International Trade (OWIT)* is an international non-profit professional organization, with chapters around the world (www.owit.org) , dedicated to advancing global trade opportunities for women. There are two active Canadian chapters: Toronto (www.owit-toronto.ca) and Ottawa (www.owit-ottawa.ca).

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