

Web Elite chief is year's entrepreneur

By **JEFF BENNETT**
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Jacques Habra said his lack of success on the college dating scene taught him what it meant to be committed to a goal even though at times he wasn't taken seriously.

Habra, a 27-year-old University of Michigan graduate who now has a steady girlfriend, was named the Andersen Young IT

Entrepreneur of the Year on Tuesday at the Michigan IT Summit at Detroit's Cobo Hall. The **Arthur Andersen** accounting and tax company selected him from three finalists because of his work as president and chief executive officer of Ann Arbor-based **Web Elite Inc.**

The award honors Michigan-based entrepreneurs for their visions and ability to turn them into successful companies.

The privately held company, founded in 1995, provides e-business consulting and development solutions so companies such as **Ford Motor Co.** and **Sun Microsystems** can track and eliminate unnecessary costs. The company expects revenue to hit \$7 million this year.

Web Elite has offices in San Francisco and New York but the

Please see IT, Page 6F

IN ESS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 2001

IT | Web Elite's Jacques Habra named 2001 Andersen Young IT Entrepreneur

From Page 1F

bulk of its 45 employees work out of the former Ann Arbor Theater 1 & 2, which Habra purchased and refurbished at a cost of more than \$2 million. Workers moved there in October.

For Habra, the award demonstrates that his commitment to passion, faith and education in building his company has paid off, he says.

"I knew I loved the technology and I developed a passion for it throughout college," Habra said. "I learned that I had to develop a deep faith within myself and that you can't do it all and you don't know it all."

Habra was born in Beirut and moved to Michigan with his family when they emigrated to the United States in 1981. The following year he became a naturalized citizen.

While growing up he received his business sense from his father, who was an executive with a pharmaceutical company, and an entrepreneurial spirit from his mother, who has five or six education-related degrees.

From his pink apartment building in Ann Arbor, Habra said he worked on writing the computer processes that would ultimately lead to the founding of his company. He used \$1,000 of his own money and any other cash he made from designing Web sites. He has never relied on outside venture capital, which he sees as an achievement.

During the award presentation, Marc Andreessen, chairman and cofounder of the now struggling **Loudcloud**, said being an entrepreneur in the technology arena means total commitment all the time.

"You experience emotional

highs and lows that are radical," said Andreessen, whose Sunnyvale, Calif.-based company provides Web infrastructure services.

"Some days you go home thinking you will be the largest company in the world," he said. "The next day you go home saying it's all over. As an entrepreneur you also experience the fog of war. You don't have a lot of information you need. You have an idea of where things are going, but you don't know what battles are going to be won and lost. To navigate that fog is one of the most stressful aspects of being an entrepreneur."

Loudcloud is in a financial fog. The company, which went public last week, said it will slash 122 jobs, or 19 percent of its workforce, in an effort to break even.

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