

CANADIAN TIRE LEADER DEVOTES LIFE TO COMPANY

By Mary Ann Gratton

Mark Foote (MBA '91) has grown up at Canadian Tire – literally. He began working for the company at the age of 16, fixing cars and pumping gas, and has worked his way up to his current position as president of Canadian Tire Retail (CTR), responsible for more than 450 stores across the country, and almost \$6 billion in total retail sales. The retail arm is responsible for about 75 per cent of the company's total retail sales.

"I've worked here my whole life, so I know every nook and cranny of this place. The teamwork here and the fact that we have fun at work is, to me, the reason why we've been successful for more than 80 years."

Mark describes his management style as "very involved. I find this company really interesting, so I feel intellectually stimulated every day when I come to work."

Canadian Tire is one of Canada's most successful retailers, a ubiquitous presence in every province, serving an estimated 90 per cent of adult Canadians. "This place is probably as much of a cult as it is a company.

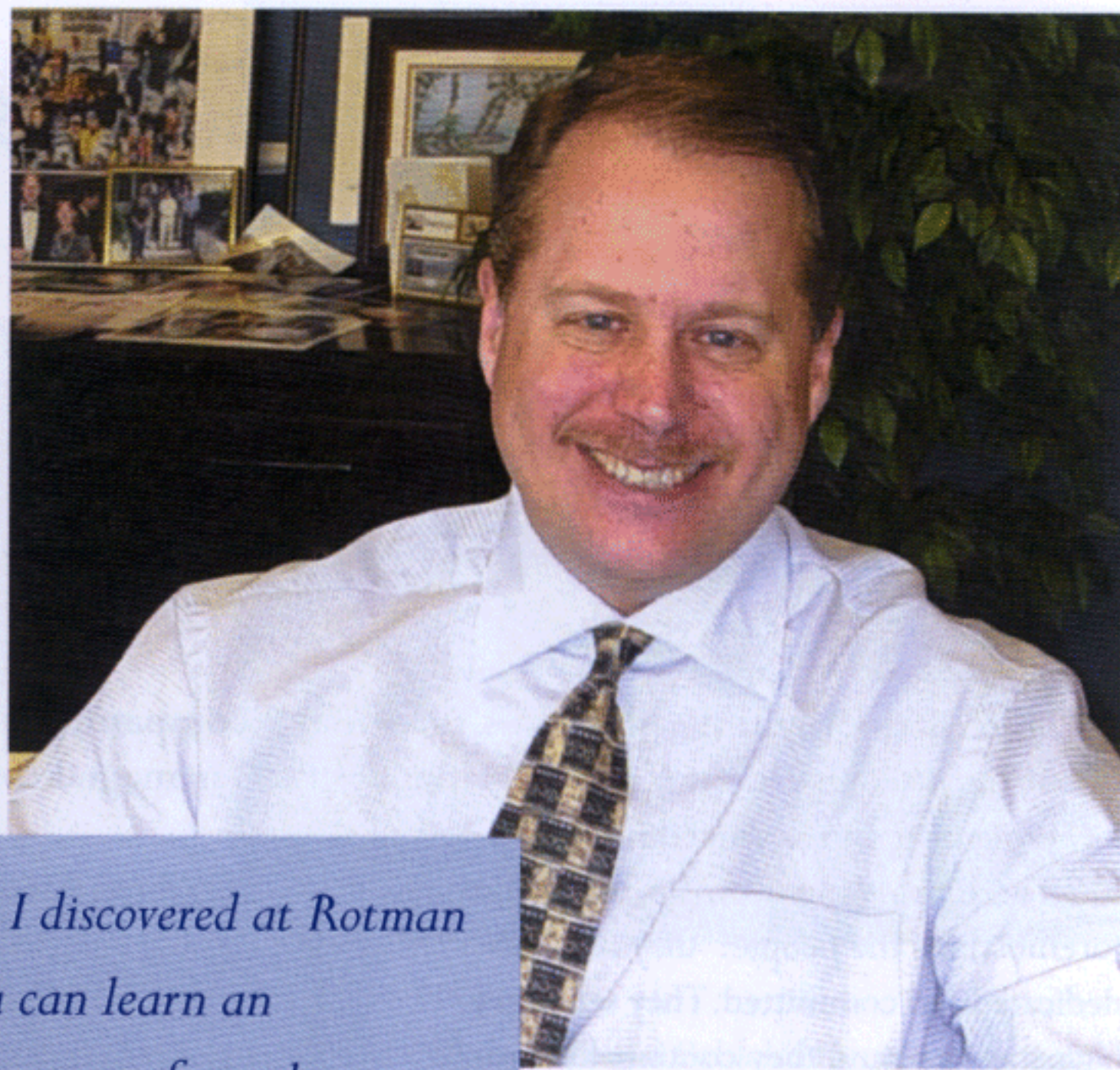
Mark says his biggest challenge is threefold: "The first challenge is getting people all over the organization excited about what we are trying to do. The second is making sure that in such a diverse organization, everyone is heading in the same direction when it comes to strategy and vision." The third challenge is measuring business performance.

"Businesses are measured in primarily financial ways, but there are a lot of core measures that go beyond the numbers on a statement, that involve important subtleties around what is really driving your performance. These are the areas I find most challenging."

It is most satisfying for Mark to watch employees and colleagues overcome obstacles they thought were insurmountable, he says. "Our company competes with the largest retailers in the world, and if you turn the clock back to 1994, some of our people weren't sure we would succeed, so watching them stand tall today and pat themselves on the back is just dynamite."

Mark was named one of Canada's *Top 40 under 40* by *The Globe and Mail's Report on Business* magazine for 2000. He was also the first employee that Canadian Tire supported to pursue an Executive MBA at the Rotman School.

He recalls being overwhelmed when he first enrolled in the program. "I remember being shocked, thinking that I was going to be really



One thing I discovered at Rotman is that you can learn an enormous amount from the people around you.

far behind – especially when I saw the experience and the skill sets of my classmates.

"One thing I took from the program is that you can learn an enormous amount from the people around you. Managers in general should remember that we are born with two ears and one mouth for a good reason. Listening is an under-leveraged skill, and if you listen to the people around you and ask questions, you can learn an awful lot that will help improve the performance of your company."

In terms of corporate responsibility, **Canadian Tire's Foundation for Families** is evidence of its commitment to the communities in which it operates, says Mark. The three-year-old national foundation raises funds for charities and social causes, but the decision making is decentralized, allowing people in the local store's communities to have a say in where the money goes. The dealer at each Canadian Tire store collaborates with the local community to decide where to direct funds. For instance, in Brandon, Manitoba, the funds are directed to local soup kitchens and food banks; in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, the company is a big supporter of the new hospital; and in Toronto, **Covenant House** shelter for homeless youth and other city shelters benefit from foundation money.

When he's not at work, Mark likes to spend time with his family. He and his wife Brenda have two sons, Ryan, 11, and Jared, 7. In the summer, they enjoy spending time boating at their cottage in the Kawartha Lakes area. In the winter, they are "a big hockey family," and Mark spends most of his free time "driving people to the rinks!"