

ROTMAN GRAD WORKS ON GROWING INNOVATION

By Mary Ann Gratton

Imagine having a job where you deal not only with the investment community, but also with a crop of creative and passionate entrepreneurs leading Canada's emerging growth companies. "The best of both worlds" – is how **Judie Thom** (MBA '93) describes her position as director of business development for the **TSX Venture Exchange**, part of TSX Group (formerly the Toronto Stock Exchange.)

Judie uses her business skills and knowledge of finance to liaise with the investment community. She also meets with CEOs of start-ups interested in exploring ways to raise capital and perhaps take their companies public. She manages a small team of people who facilitate a connection between these growth companies and the people they may need to know – investment dealers, lawyers, accountants and consultants – in order to bring their firms to market.

TSX Venture was established three years ago to give emerging companies an alternative financing option for raising the capital necessary to further their growth strategies, albeit on a smaller stage than the TSX. More than 2,000 companies are listed on the venture exchange, primarily in the mining, oil and gas, biotechnology and technology sectors. The size of the investment community varies in each of the five city centres it oversees, including Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Montreal.

Judie describes the venture exchange as an 'incubator' for the TSX, enabling entrepreneurs to grow their firms as public companies under a spotlight less public than the TSX.

"The venture exchange is exciting and dynamic – it's a place where you see a lot of innovation and ideas in the kinds of companies, ideas, products and services people are bringing to market," says Judie. "These people truly believe in their companies and what they have to offer. We feel that we are nurturing Canada's next generation of entrepreneurs and enhancing the country's innovation agenda."

TSX Venture acts as a feeder system for the larger exchange, so that when companies that have listed publicly on the venture exchange are ready, they can move onto the TSX. "Our value proposition is working quite well, because 43 per cent of the new listings to the senior exchange in 2003 came from us. This 'graduation process' is usually a very smooth and seamless transition, and companies tell us we are a great space for nurturing Canada's future corporations."

Her group is also responsible for promoting the venture exchange. "We are a small team, so we are non-bureaucratic and we've been able to do a lot over the past few years with limited resources," she says. "We try to expand our reach and encourage participants from different segments of the market."

Asked to describe her working style, Judie says, "My mindset going into work is always based on accomplishment. Anyone who has taken an MBA is a type-A personality, so each day I am focused on reaching my goals. I work hard to keep the momentum going on my initiatives. What I love about this job is that we can be both creative and entrepreneurial, so I strongly encourage those sorts of traits and attributes within my team. I am definitely not a micro manager. I believe in the strength and value of the team we have, and trust that they have the core competencies and skill sets to do the jobs they are hired to do."

Before joining the venture exchange three years ago, Judie served in management positions, often in a marketing capacity, at various financial institutions, including **CIBC**, **Bank of Montreal**, and a venture capital firm. Prior to that, she served as general manager of the **Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce** for seven years. "My career has always had a marketing slant, and I think the combination of an MBA and a marketing focus is good," she says. "In marketing, you tend to connect with many other departments, so the strategic approach I learned fits right in."

Judie enjoyed her MBA years at Rotman. "This degree really enhanced my strategic thinking and has given me the tools to excel in all of the positions that I've had."

When she isn't working, Judie Thom (nee Dyck) and her husband, **Trevor Thom** (MBA '94) who works at **Merrill Lynch**, spend time with their two-year-old daughter Sophie. Judie also runs competitively, and has completed both the New York and Boston Marathons. The couple enjoys downhill skiing and traveling, and they have taken Sophie with them on trips to Hawaii and throughout the United States.

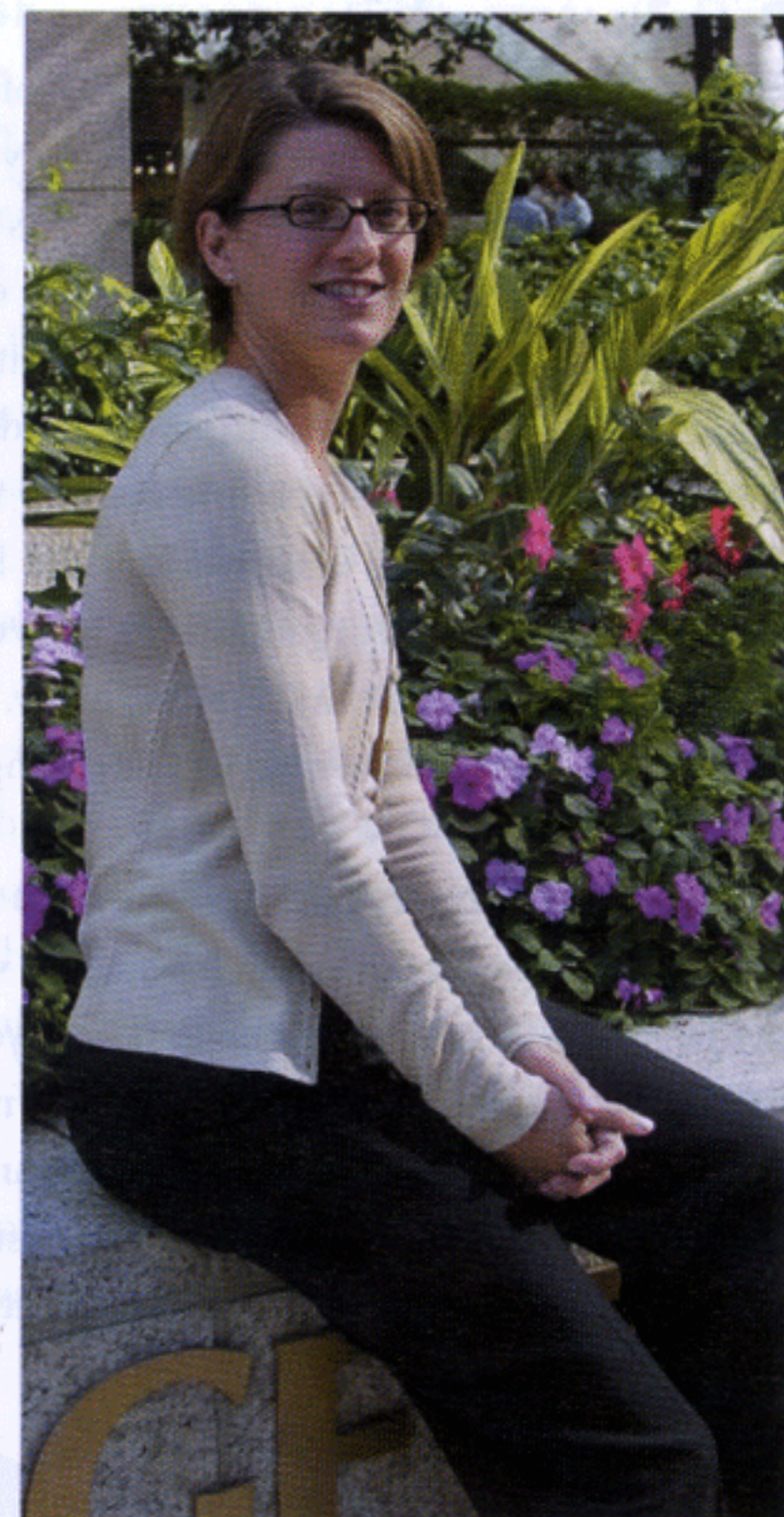


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