



gin to wonder if you can play or if you can just advise. I've always said that there were two types of people in business: those who want to make money and those who like to play the game. I like to play the game."

When he was asked to become partner and take over the finances of Fountain Tire, he declined. "I wasn't really interested in the accounting part of accounting," he explains. Instead, he helped find someone else for the position and bought out one of the partners and became 25 percent owner.

Hesje spent his first week in the warehouse and the next five years without a title. Fountain Tire sells tires and related services in Western Canada: all kinds of tires – passenger, truck, agriculture, industrial, off road and has 148 stores in Western Canada, – up from 27 in 1984, when Hesje joined the company.

"We sold 49 percent to Goodyear in 1988 and, once we did that, it became a very interesting company. We have entrepreneurial management with the resources and expertise of a large company and still retain the common sense and the ability to implement rather than just strategize." When he hobnobs with the bigwigs at Goodyear, Hesje admits that

there are differences in approach. "We live in different worlds, but you learn from people who think differently from you. I think we learn from each other."

Hesje says he still enjoys playing the game. "In a way, for me, I don't think I've ever really left teaching. Probably the most satisfying thing in business is helping other people see what they can do."

It's been interesting enough to keep him here in Edmonton. "I grew up in Saskatchewan so I guess I like the four seasons. I golf, curl and I go fishing at least once a year. I've met lots of interesting people. I've had lots of freedom to do what I want to do. I never really had a reason to move."

"I think that it's very easy to get caught up in details – personal or business. They say that the devil's in the details. I never really plan things. Things come up that end up being interesting adventures. I think a lot of things are what you make of them. Why get caught up with the devil?" **B**

*Brian's daughter Allison is a '99 BCom currently working in Killarney, Ireland.*

## PERFECT COMPLEMENT □ The good life in Alberta and success

**Susan and Lee Ready have it going on in Spruce Grove,** Alberta. Sitting around their dining room table in their bright bungalow, you can see hockey paraphernalia mingling with bikes and shovels as winter eases into spring – the detritus of their two thriving young sons Matthew, 9, and Bennett, 6.

**S**usan is just completing her MBA part time. She and her husband Lee run Ready Engineering, which just won the Alberta Chambers of Commerce Small Business of the Year award for 2003. "Alberta is a great place to be an engineer," comments Lee, '98 MBA/MEng. "We have a competitive cost of living, a solid customer base in the energy industry here, and the US marketplace needs our talent."

"I have access to a good talent pool of University of Alberta, NAIT, and SAIT graduates," adds Lee. "Their high-quality skill sets combine with the low cost of living and the fact that we fill a specialty niche." The Readys leverage this combination to offer a skill set to the US and Canada. Currently TransAlta is their biggest client, but they have expanded into Olympia, Washington as well as Houston, Texas. Their expertise in ABB Bailey and Westinghouse Ovation DCS systems – used to

run water plants and electric generation facilities – are examples of niches skills that they export to the world.

Lee began the business while taking his MBA/MEng. "I was always interested in finance and management and had strong opinions about how things should be run. The MBA helped determine whether my ideas were out in left field or not." Lee had been working for Westinghouse using his interest in management to work his way up the ladder and taking his MBA part time. "My boss was ousted," says Lee unceremoniously explaining his subsequent departure from the company, which was in serious financial trouble at the time. Lee used his buyout from Westinghouse to go full time into the MBA/MEng program but also saw an opportunity when Westinghouse was carved up and sold to various other holdings. He took his first contract and hasn't looked back.

Susan, a former nurse, began working for the business taking care of HR





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and the books and their two young children. Her role has evolved as has her need for more education to handle the accounting functions of the growing company. “I have an aptitude for math and, with my nursing background, I am more empathetic and better at communications than Lee. He can be very direct,” she comments with a smile. “He can dish it out, but he can take it too,” she says.

“Susan is the most competent person I know,” comments Lee. “I can leave the accounting and HR roles to her and I don’t have to worry about those things. I value her intelligence. I can ask her to figure something out – and I know she will figure it out.”

The Readys are co-owners and find that the quality of life in Spruce Grove is what helps them manage the stress of running their own business and raising a family plus taking on the rigours of an MBA. “I can pick up the kids and come home for lunch every day,” comments Lee. “I see more of my

family now than I ever did before. My employees value the same lifestyle. Some of them live on acreages, and with the company located in Spruce Grove, they don’t have to drive through city traffic.”

“We’ve grown the business to a size where we can be gone for more than a week now,” comments Susan. “I just hired an administrative assistant.”

The Readys remain focussed on their goals of growing their company by focussing on their niche strengths and using the advantages of life in Alberta as leverage for good employees and a cost edge to enter the US market.

They also remain focussed on their family and prairie lifestyle. “We have traditional family values,” comments Susan. They plan to spend time this summer with the boys camping, hooking up with friends and family, and fishing – maybe even some windsurfing. **B**