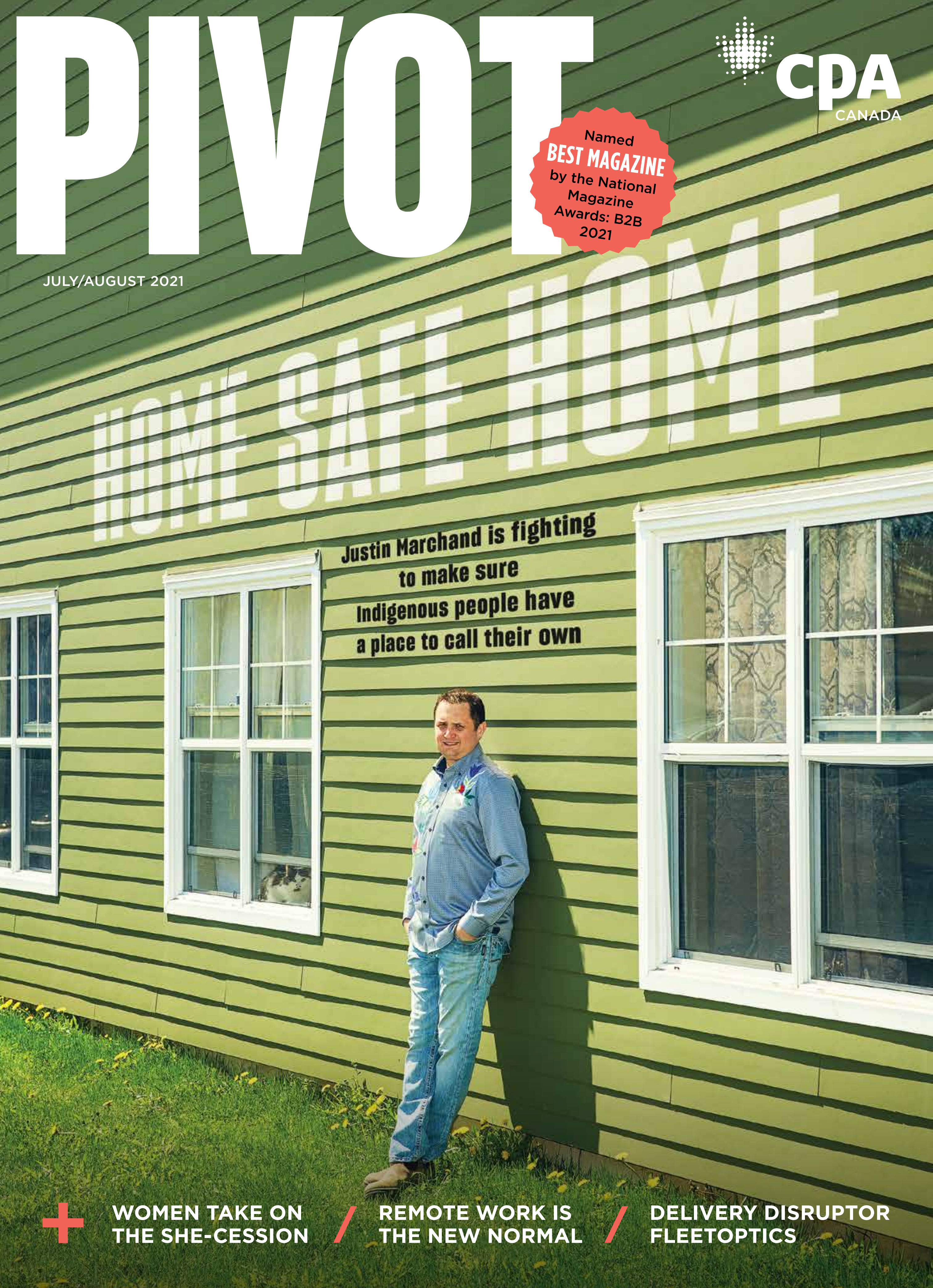

PIVOT

CPA CANADA

Named BEST MAGAZINE by the National Magazine Awards: B2B 2021

JULY/AUGUST 2021

HOME SAFE HOME

Justin Marchand is fighting to make sure Indigenous people have a place to call their own

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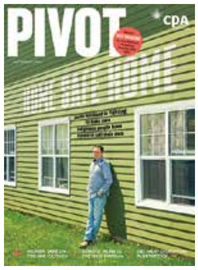
PHOTOGRAPH BY AARON WYNIA

FEATURES



ON THE COVER

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL EHRENWORTH

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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THE GREATER GOOD

Business and society must work together to bring about the recovery that Canada needs.

BY CHARLES-ANTOINE ST-JEAN

Bonjour à tous.

It is striking to see how uneven the pain from the pandemic's fallout has been across the Canadian population—and the prospect of an uneven economic recovery for Canada is a real threat to this country's long-term prosperity. As a former Comptroller General of Canada, I can appreciate the hurdles the government of Canada has faced in the past year from an economic perspective. Yet the federal budget tabled in April made clear that the human cost has been staggering.

We as Canadians have a major challenge ahead of us and we must leverage our strengths to help those hit hardest and ensure a better future for all Canadians, while keeping a keen eye on fiscal balance.

The pandemic exposed our society's fault lines and the ways in which people working in lower-paying essential jobs—and their families—are among those who have borne the greatest burdens of illness and loss. This is perhaps most painfully obvious in the fact that women have been disproportionately affected by this global upheaval. The fact that the proportion of women in the workplace is at its lowest point since 1986 is startling. The federal budget has sought to confront this situation with proposals such as the $10/day childcare program and other investments. This is something CPA Canada publicly supported when it was cited in last fall's Throne Speech. It will ensure more women can fully participate in the labour force—a shift that will spur economic growth and entrepreneurial activity while creating a more equitable and inclusive society.

To build back better, however, requires more than just government investment: companies, organizations and business leaders need to take a close look at the composition of their workforces and find ways to ensure that underrepresented communities have as much opportunity to succeed as anyone else. We must remove hiring biases to ensure members of marginalized groups have equal access to a prosperous future.

Beyond the boardroom, other issues the pandemic made clear is precarious housing and precarious employment. The pandemic has upended countless families in various hard-hit industries across Canada and, while the lack of affordable housing in cities is a hot topic of discussion, the issue is perhaps more pressing and visible in remote communities and on First Nations reserves that have experienced decades of neglect. Change is long overdue.

BEYOND THE BOTTOM LINE

Rather alarmingly, Edelman's recent 2021 Trust Barometer survey found widespread mistrust in corporate and government leaders. Post-pandemic, a more equitable Canada is necessary, and perhaps the first step on this path involves rebuilding trust. As the Edelman survey shows, there is a lot of work to do in this space: "This is a wake-up call for leaders, who need to take action to build trust amongst their stakeholders or risk falling behind," the survey concludes.

We're experiencing a sea change in Canadians' expectations, and if any organization wants to lead, it must first earn the trust of the people. To do that, it needs to listen to the voices of all Canadians and ensure no group is left behind.

Here in Canada, there is a distinct approach to cultivating a healthy and thriving economy. What makes Canada such a good place to work, live and raise a family, is a deep understanding that economic and social progress just don't go hand-in-hand; they are fundamental to achieving success.

The profession has been beating this drum for a long time with our concept of the Canadian Ideal of Good Business, which integrates the needs of economic growth with the needs of society and the environment, and balances those needs with fairness and compassion. That ideal is something we need now more than ever and it showcases how building back better goes beyond the bottom line.

We must ensure a recovery in which social development and economic development thrive and benefit each other; a recovery that adds value, delivers profit and succeeds in the long term; a recovery that champions compassionate prosperity and growth without greed.

What Canada needs right now are leaders who look beyond just what they should do and instead endeavour to do everything they can. There is a new era dawning and, with it, new expectations.

Relevons le défi ensemble!

I would like to congratulate our *Pivot* team on their recent success at the National Magazine Awards: B2B competition. *Pivot* emerged as the big winner this year with six gold medals, including Best Magazine, and two silvers. An incredible showing considering the steep competition this year. Bravo! ◆

PHOTOGRAPH BY **LINDSEY GIBEAU, WESTBORO STUDIO**

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FIRST IN

HOME OFFICE

PAY DIRT

A CPA leaves his comfortable job at an accounting firm for green pastures, where Big Tech is being harnessed to save the family farm **BY MATTHEW HAGUE**

When, 12 years ago, Kristjan Hebert decided to leave his job as a CPA at the Moosomin, Sask., offices of MNP to work on his family farm, five of the firm's partners wished him luck. The rest told him he was making a big mistake.

Hebert understood why. The 3,500 acres of Saskatchewan land, where his parents and relatives grow grains like canola, barley and rye, wasn't quite large enough to justify the move, he felt.

But there were bigger reasons why many felt Hebert probably should have stuck with accounting. According to Statistics Canada, since 1991, the number of Canadian farmers has dropped by 24 per cent, with the average age of farmers jumping to 54 from 47. Younger adults like Hebert, now 39, had been deterred by the notoriously difficult business, with its low profit margins, high labour costs and long hours. Now, those challenges are being exacerbated by the unpredictability of climate change, as well as the pandemic that, while expected to push food prices up by five per cent this year, has also made workers more costly to hire, train and safely bring onto farms.

While farming might not seem like the most attractive vocation these days, it's still an extremely important one. "Canada has the world's sixth-largest arable land base," says Cornelia Kreplin, CEO of the Canadian Agri-Food Automation and Intelligence Network, an Alberta-based group of startups, universities and farmers looking for ways to innovate the industry. "But, in order to feed everyone, we will need to increase our productivity by about 70 per cent." Underlying that stress: according to the National Farmers Union, Canada has lost about 20 per cent of its farmland—10 million acres—since 1976.

Farm employees training with new equipment


A combine harvests canola


Sensors track exactly how much water crops need


Rye seeding in the fall

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF **HEBERT GRAIN VENTURES**

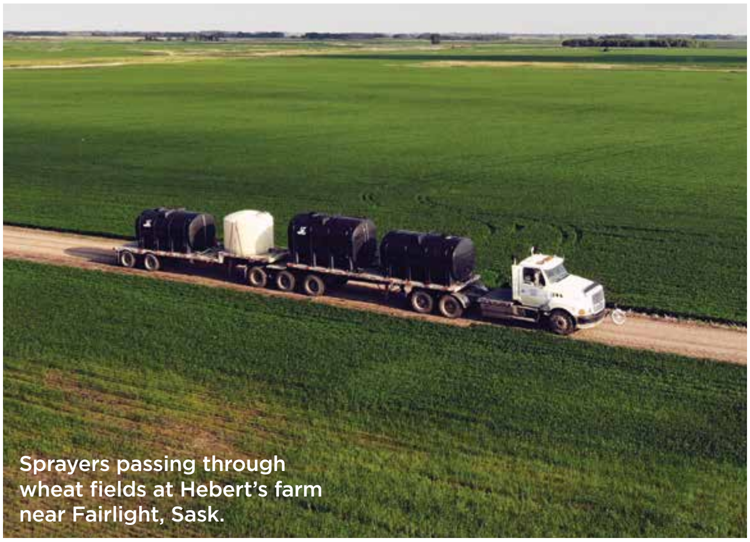
Equipment undergoing maintenance ahead of the harvest

Kristjan Hebert is leveraging tech and data to grow his business

The number of Canadian farmers has dropped by

24%

since 1991



Sprayers passing through wheat fields at Hebert's farm near Fairlight, Sask.

To Kreplin, there is only one path forward: "We need new technologies to make better use of land and water and improve efficiency," she says. "It's the only way."

Hebert places a lot of value on tech. Since leaving his career in accounting, he's helped grow the family business, Hebert Grain Ventures, from 3,500 acres to more than 27,000 acres—approximately 30 times the size of the typical farm in Canada. "We wouldn't have been able to grow the way we have without using technology," says Hebert, who is always trying new tools to improve performance. He and his team use sensors embedded in the soil to understand exactly how much water is needed. Digital planning apps, based on GPS maps, help him determine exactly where and how his seed-laying machines should be driven to plant the optimal number of crops with the optimal number of seeds. "If I can save even 50 dollars an acre per year, that's over a million dollars."

Of course, Hebert's background crunching numbers has been an asset in the farm's growth. "My training has given me the ability to understand the business side of farming," he says. "When I'm about to make a capital investment, I'm able to do a cost-benefit analysis, think about the return on investment and see how it will affect my debt-to-assets ratio." That understanding gives him the confidence to invest in new tools, undaunted by the sticker shock of, say, a million-dollar combine harvester or a $500,000 tractor.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF **HEBERT GRAIN VENTURES**

According to Kreplin, "there has been a tremendous investment in technology to optimize production in other sectors, but the agriculture sector in Canada has been a bit slow to adopt." One factor could be the advancing age of the average farmer, but there is also a major capital investment required. "Traditionally, farmers don't buy something until they have to—or are convinced that the expenditure will result in a return on their investment. Emerging technologies really need to prove that they can provide the return and are worth the risk."

"TECHNOLOGY IS CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPOWERING FARMERS TO DO OUR BEST WORK"

Much of the technology Hebert uses comes from big international players, like John Deere and CNH Industrial. Yet, according to Darcy Cook, the vice-president of engineering and general manager at Winnipeg-based JCA Technologies, a firm that specializes in developing the software for autonomous farm technology, Canada is becoming a hotbed of new agri-tech. "We have an advantage here in that we have the wide-open spaces to test the inventions," he says.

One of Cook's inventions, a machine that prowls vineyards pulling up weeds, is currently being implemented in France in collaboration with French company EXXACT Robotics. British Columbia-based TechBrew Robotics has developed a robotic arm that uses a high-tech camera and a gentle suction cup to pick mushrooms and pack them in boxes.

"The typical Canadian mushroom farm has a hard time maintaining staff," says TechBrew CEO Mike Boudreau. "People don't want to work overnight, yet mushrooms grow very quickly and need constant picking. Our machines run 24 hours a day. We can increase the yield of a mushroom farm by 10 to 20 per cent."

Hebert isn't bothered by the notion that farmers themselves might be made redundant, sidelined by AI and robotics. "There's a sense that tech is replacing people," he says. "To me, it's creating new opportunities and empowering farmers to do our best work. No one needs to stand outside with their finger in the air, wondering which way the wind is blowing." ◆

THE PRICE OF FAME

Creatives of all stripes have been forced to reimagine how to connect with the public and earn money in our ever-changing times. As a result, online platforms that feature user-generated content have prospered as the "creator economy" gains footing. This past spring, Cameo, the video-sharing website that allows more than 30,000 celebrities to sell personalized messages to fans, raised US$100 million in funding and tripled its valuation to US$1 billion. "My D-list celebrity might be your favourite person in the world," Cameo chief executive Steven Galanis recently told the *Wall Street Journal*. What's a brush with celebrity worth? —*Steve Brearton*

HERE'S WHAT THEY'RE CHARGING ON CAMEO:

CAITLYN JENNER
Olympic gold medallist, reality television personality

Customer review: "Thank you, Caitlyn. It was a really great birthday gift. My friend loved it!"

KEVIN O'LEARY, A.K.A. MR. WONDERFUL
Canadian businessman and *Shark Tank* cast member

Customer review: "Thank you, Mr. Wonderful, but you didn't mention the name of our company, WSO2, which is super important for us. Could you redo it with our company name, please?"

KEVIN MCDONALD
Member of Canadian comedy troupe Kids in the Hall

Customer review: "5 stars are not enough, Cameo! This is at least 6-8 stars worth of pure funny!"

LINDSAY LOHAN
Actor and television personality

Customer review: "Brief. Unimaginative. Laboured."

HAYLEY WICKENHEISER
Four-time Olympic gold medallist

Customer review: "Amazing!!!!!! Also the first person who has wondered if the Soo is Sault Ste. Marie (it is). Thank you!"

CAROLE BASKIN
Founder and CEO of Big Cat Rescue, featured in the Netflix series *Tiger King*

Customer review: "Thank you, Carole! It's amazing & purrrfect in every way!"

ALL FIGURES USD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GETTY

THE FORECAST

ACCOUNTING FOR A NEW CAPITALISM

In the push toward a sustainability-based economic model, accountants must be willing to embrace change

GORD BEAL

The calls for a new capitalism are increasing. Bankers, investors and business leaders are joining others who are challenging an unsustainable status quo. Although the degree and speed to which capitalism will evolve remains to be seen, dramatic shifts in our ideas about acceptable business behaviour are taking form. Existential issues such as climate change, the global pandemic, crisis in the world economy—and the stark inequalities these have exposed—have brought us to a tipping point. Change is inevitable, not simply because it is the right thing to do, but because it may be necessary for human survival.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has long been a champion of the principles of a new capitalism. The WEF has done extensive work to define this as the capacity of the private sector to generate long-term value for all stakeholders, including shareholders, members of society and our planet. We have already seen major corporate leaders, in partnership with the WEF, speak up and commit to a rebalancing of corporate purpose around this concept. “It’s time for a new capitalism—a more fair, equal and sustainable capitalism,” Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff wrote in a *New York Times* column, “where businesses… don’t just take from society but truly give back and have a positive impact.”

Capitalism, as it exists today, has driven significant advancements in our world, but it is also a root cause of global inequity, giving grossly inadequate attention to social and environmental issues. The inherent competitive nature of the system, which prioritizes profitability and shareholder value, has failed to unfold in a sustainable manner.

Today, a new expectation for corporate performance is emerging. As the world shifts its attention to this broader definition of capitalism, the accounting profession has an opportunity to respond.

Accounting is the language of business and it plays a critical role in transactional processing, measurement and reporting on financial performance. This is important because financial capital enables corporations and other organizations to achieve their objectives. Accounting then demonstrates and communicates if those objectives are being achieved in a fiscally responsible manner. Yet accounting does little to report on the actual achievements of newer, purpose-driven objectives in which this financial capital is being invested.

But the language of business is changing. Accountability and transparency are foundational tenets of the profession and they are at the heart of this discussion. Corporations and their leaders are expected to state what they are doing, how they are doing it and whether or not they have achieved their goals. This relies on clear and understandable reporting that will inform decision-making and lead to fundamental shifts in behaviour by corporations, investors and other stakeholders across the entire system.

THE OPPORTUNITY IS NOW FOR ACCOUNTANTS TO DEMONSTRATE LEADERSHIP AND DRIVE THE CHANGE OUR WORLD NEEDS

In his 2016 book, *Chief Value Officer*, Mervyn King, former chair of the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC), makes a compelling argument for accountants and CFOs to focus on organizational value creation that extends far beyond a financial lens. King advocates for a multi-capital approach to long-term value creation. These multiple capitals include: natural, human, social and relationship, manufactured and financial. As this is far different from a traditional capitalist perspective, how we define success and measure performance must also be different. Movement toward a new form of capitalism is incumbent on changes in the underlying framework and paradigm that support it.

Opportunities for change are emerging. Social purpose corporations, the doughnut economy, and a transition from an industrial age-based linear economy to a circular economy all give rise to the need for a new range of performance metrics. Frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) and integrated reporting provide some of the answers. Most recently, we are seeing the likely establishment of a global Sustainability Standards Board by the IFRS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAGAN MCLEOD

Foundation, with an initial focus on climate change—a critical issue of our time. The confluence of sustainability reporting frameworks appears to be on the horizon.

In accounting for sustainability, the measurement and reporting of social and environmental factors must be viewed as essential in corporate performance. While helping to drive long-term value creation for a broad spectrum of stakeholders, these elements must become the foundation of corporate purpose.

The opportunity is now for professional accountants to demonstrate leadership and help drive the changes our world needs. We can drive systemic change by extending the same effort toward these critical areas as we do to financial performance. With the movement toward a more inclusive form of capitalism that embraces multiple measures of success for both people and planet, the need for a new accounting is clear. As CPAs, we need to measure what matters most to ensure that which matters is achieved. ◆

Gord Beal is a CPA and vice-president, research, guidance and support for CPA Canada.

IN THE FIELD

BASIC TRAINING

My CPA experience has given me the skills to handle my new job as a small-town mayor

DONNA SALVATI

In December 2020, I became the mayor of Val-Morin, Que., a quaint town of 3,000 people nestled in the Laurentian area about an hour north of Montreal. After my predecessor resigned, I was parachuted into a job I had never aspired to. I had been municipal councillor for three years and, following election rules, I was chosen to fill the vacancy. Still, I was apprehensive about this new role and questioned whether I was equipped to handle its demands. The position comes with its share of challenges but as I face them daily, I think about how my training and career as a CPA have helped me immensely.

In my professional life, I spent 40 years in public practice. I started my career at Clarkson Gordon

(now EY), where I spent four years building on what I had learned during my academic training. After that, I co-founded a general practice firm and, during the next 36 years, served small-business and professional clients while increasing my knowledge and honing my skills. During that time, I also taught auditing at McGill University and HEC (Université de Montréal), which gave me the opportunity to acquire a crucial skill: public speaking. I still get butterflies in my stomach prior to public speaking but, thanks to my teaching experience and a little bit of deep breathing, the butterflies dissipate shortly after I get started.

COMBINING A SKILL FOR NUMBERS WITH LOGICAL THINKING CAN BE INDISPENSABLE AS A MAYOR

Public speaking is clearly important, but a mayor also needs to be able to analyze all aspects of a situation before making a decision. There are many factors at play—from financial concerns to environmental impacts to effects on residents' well-being—and you need to zero in on what's important. Something as simple as introducing a fee for parking in a public lot can be viewed from multiple angles. While it might increase revenue for the town, it might also reduce the number of visitors. This, in turn, may have a negative impact on the local economy, but could also be good for residents by reducing noise and pollution. My CPA training taught me, among other things, how to think and how to process information. Daily, I put those skills to good use and they've improved with practice.

This type of analysis and the training I received reminds me of when I wrote my professional accounting exam, which required us to tie together our knowledge of accounting, personal and corporate taxation, compliance issues and other matters while avoiding red herrings. As well, anything to do with numbers is familiar territory, for instance: financial analyses, budget preparation and salary equity issues. Give me numbers to evaluate and I am happy!

Combining a skill for numbers with logical thinking, another weapon in the CPA arsenal, can be indispensable as a mayor. When preparing the town's annual budget, for example, you need to be logical and make sure your decisions make sense. Believe me, when you stand in front of a group of anxious citizens and they question your choices, logic is your best friend.

It is now my job to act in the best interests of all Val-Morin residents. It is important that they understand the reasons for the decisions we make. Many people struggle to see the bigger picture: how one decision may benefit some while having a detrimental effect on others. It has become one of my missions to educate people by fostering an atmosphere of understanding, collaboration and respect while working to reduce cynicism and negativity.

By the nature of the profession, as a CPA I have spent my life learning and growing as a person. This opportunity is giving me the chance to continue learning something new. More importantly—and the real reason why I accepted this job—is that I can make a difference in my community. Being mayor is a challenge. But, thanks to my training and career as a CPA, I am confident I have the skills to succeed. ◆

Donna Salvati is the recipient of the 2015 Ordre des CPA du Québec Award of Excellence in Community Service for her involvement in her community. She also teaches fitness classes and is a director and co-founder of the Oligny Salvati Foundation, created to help people who are less fortunate, especially teens lacking family support.

TAX LAB

RISK FACTORS

We're just beginning to appreciate the long-term tax implications of remote work, for both companies and workers

BRUCE BALL

One of the legacies associated with the pandemic is that remote work is here to stay. As more employees opt to work from home, employers will need to manage the significant tax issues these arrangements can bring.

Indeed, a recent poll by Gartner, the global research and advisory firm, found that 48 per cent of employees are likely to work remotely some or all of the time after the pandemic, compared to 30 per cent before the pandemic began. As workforces get more mobile, employers can find themselves facing an array of new tax risks and obligations, especially when employees do their work cross-border.

48
Percentage of employees who are likely to work remotely some or all of the time, post-pandemic

ILLUSTRATION BY KAGAN MCLEOD

The spike in home-based workers during the pandemic already caused disruption this past tax season, as practitioners and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) worked through millions of first-time tax claims for home office expenses (see "Homeward bound" in *Pivot*'s March/April 2021 issue). While the CRA simplified these claims for the 2020 tax year, the situation showed just how complicated these rules have become.

As the issues we discuss below show, home office expense claims are just one of many tax risks that businesses need to navigate. A second legacy of the pandemic—less certain but urgently needed—may be the attention it brings to this extreme tax complexity, and to the opportunity to update and simplify Canada's rules through a federal government review.

WORKING ACROSS PROVINCIAL BORDERS

When employees and employers are located in the same province or territory, both are subject to the same tax rules. The issues that employers encounter are consistent with usual work arrangements.

But wrinkles arise when the employee works in a different province. For example, the CRA says employers need to make source withholdings from their employee's pay based on the province or territory where the employee physically reports for work. How do you determine this in a remote work context? This question gets even harder to answer for employees of large companies who interact with colleagues in offices or operations in multiple jurisdictions.

When it's not clear where the employee reports, the CRA allows you to state the employee's location based on the source of their payment. Again, this is problematic in an increasingly digitized world, where a payroll can be centrally administered for all locations and the people managing that payroll can be spread across different jurisdictions.

The rules are more straightforward for employees. They pay provincial income tax based on the province or territory they live in. Payroll deductions might be mismatched if the employer is in a different location, but the difference is settled through a tax refund or payment at the end of the year or reduced withholdings during the year if an application is made.

For employers, however, payroll tax problems are just the start.

Where income tax is concerned, cross-border domestic issues include how to allocate a corporation's income among the provinces and territories it operates in to determine each jurisdiction's share of that income for tax. This is usually done based on the proportion of revenue and salaries connected to a "permanent establishment" in each province. The government defines this broadly, saying that a permanent establishment might exist in a province when, among other reasons, an employee or agent has general authority to enter into contracts for the corporation.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY

CPA CANADA HAS ENCOURAGED CRA TO REVIEW HOW RULES CAN BETTER SUIT MOBILE WORKERS

If a home-working employee has this authority, their home could count as a permanent establishment, causing a portion of the company's salary and revenue to be allocated to the home office's jurisdiction. While this might lead to only minor changes in amounts allocated to each province and territory, it could trigger requirements for filing provincial corporate tax returns in Alberta or Quebec (i.e., if the corporation is not otherwise taxable there).

CPA Canada and other stakeholders are in regular discussions with the CRA about these issues, encouraging them to review how the rules could be updated to suit a more mobile workforce. We've also asked for more clarity on remote work issues—for employers that may not know where employees are doing their work, or employees working in multiple jurisdictions, for example.

WORKING ACROSS NATIONAL BORDERS

Similar tax issues can crop up in an international context and, again, the pandemic has highlighted their complexity.

Consider a worker who lives in a border city such as Windsor, Ont., and who, before the pandemic, commuted daily to a full-time job in Detroit. Under the usual rules, the United States would tax the

Introducing our 2020-21 CIRP graduates.

The Canadian Association of Insolvency and Restructuring Professionals (CAIRP) is pleased to congratulate our recent graduates who successfully completed the Chartered Insolvency and Restructuring Professional (CIRP) Qualification Program. The CIRP designation is the exclusive pathway to become a Licensed Insolvency Trustee.

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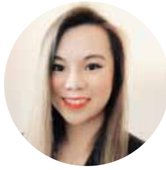

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employee's income. The employee would also report the income on their Canadian tax return but avoid having the income taxed again by claiming a tax credit for foreign-source income.

When lockdowns were imposed and the individual worked from home, the tax situation regarding employees like these got much more complicated. Among other issues, in our example:

- The U.S. employer now employs someone in a foreign country and needs to figure out their Canadian tax reporting responsibilities.
- The Canadian employee needs to ensure the foreign employer withholds the right amount of tax.
- The employee could create a permanent establishment for the U.S. employer in Canada, with the extra tax obligations this entails.

While the CRA has initiated special policies and guidance to ease the burden of some rules during the pandemic, these issues need more permanent consideration as the popularity of remote work continues. (See the CRA's website for details on COVID-19-related relief for cross-border workers.)

In the meantime, employers are advised to keep tabs on the locations of their remotely working employees and to keep these tax issues in mind when determining their policies for allowing employees to work virtually across domestic and international borders. ◆

Bruce Ball, FCPA, FCA, is the vice-president of taxation at CPA Canada.

SHAM, WOW

A catalogue of recent cons

BY DAVE ZARUM

PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY

"An age-old pump-and-dump scheme"

How FBI assistant director William Sweeney described an alleged cryptocurrency scam perpetrated by antivirus software entrepreneur John McAfee. McAfee and a former employee were indicted on charges of fraudulently promoting seven initial coin offerings (ICOs) on social media, while failing to disclose to investors that they had been paid to do so. Additionally, McAfee was allegedly paid more than US$11.6 million in Bitcoin, Ethereum and other cryptocurrencies in exchange for promoting them on Twitter without disclosure of payment, a regulatory violation. In June, McAfee was found dead in a Spanish prison. Authorities had planned to extradite him to the United States to face charges.

3,989

Estimated population of the town of Nipawin, Sask., where more than 100 locals fell victim to identity-theft fraud. Unlike the typical scam in which the perpetrator impersonates the Canadian Revenue Agency in order to coerce targets to send money or provide personal information, this scam used victims' personal information to apply for relief benefits. Police have yet to determine how the scammer obtained the personal information, such as social insurance numbers, but warned Canadians to be as vigilant as possible.

"It's difficult for people to protect themselves...they have to monitor their banking, monitor their T4s and take precautions to safeguard their information as much as possible," Nipawin RCMP Cpl. Josh Martin told the *Humboldt Journal*.

Scams and frauds in Canada

YEAR TO DATE

21,484
Canadian reports of fraud

14,925
Canadian victims of fraud

$50M
Lost to fraud

*AS OF MAR. 31, 2021

+400%

Rise in cryptocurrency crimes in Canada between 2017 and 2020, according to a recent report from the RCMP. An RCMP spokesperson added that, in the first eight months of 2020 alone, Canadians lost nearly $11 million through digital currency scams, which used methods of impersonation, threats and extortion to create a false sense of urgency among victims.

"It is important to understand that Canadian government agencies or police do not demand payment through the exchange of cryptocurrency," said Sgt. Raju Mitra, a B.C. RCMP federal policing prevention and engagement officer. "Even urgent demands by legitimate agencies will provide convenient, secure options and reasonable time to pay."

BY THE NUMBERS

CANADIAN LOYALISTS

Ever since Canadian Tire introduced those iconic notes featuring Sandy McTire in 1958 to entice shoppers to a Toronto gas bar, mass loyalty programs have helped Canadian companies attract and retain customers. As our timeline illustrates, brand affinity runs deep in our country—more than two-thirds of Canadian shoppers call themselves “staunchly brand loyal.” Today, the average Canadian has 13 reward program memberships, making us among the most faithful global consumers. —*Steve Brearton*

1958

Canadian Tire money debuts.

1986

Zellers launches **Club Z**. By the ’90s, the program is used by 65 per cent of Canadian households.

In the early 2000s, members could redeem 90 million Club Z points for a Porsche Boxster.

1998

Canadian Airlines’ **Canadian Plus Executive Platinum** program begins.

“We will never say no to any Executive Platinum passenger and companion who want to redeem their miles for seats,” a spokesperson says.

1995

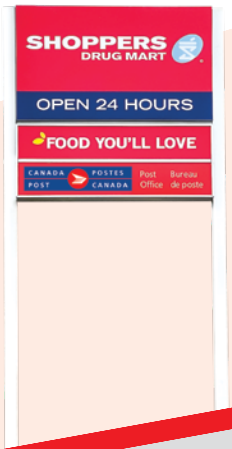
Petro-Canada introduces **Petro-Points**. Initially, members could redeem points for cribbage boards, toaster ovens and golf balls through a catalogue.

Canada’s first loyalty program

The introduction of Canadian Tire money in the late 1950s helped spark Canadians’ love of loyalty programs. The initiative was the idea of Muriel Billes, wife of Canadian Tire co-founder A.J. Billes. Here are three facts about the uniquely Canuck currency:

1. Bills are printed by the Canadian Bank Note Company in Ottawa. More than 1.5 billion have been circulated.
2. There is an avid collector market for Canadian Tire money. Some bills, like a 1958 50-cent note, are reportedly worth $1,500 or more.
3. In 2004, a CIBC cash machine in Moncton, N.B., accidentally dispensed Canadian Tire money.

PHOTOGRAPHS: PILOTS BY **MICHAEL JUNG**; GOLF BY **D BABBAGE**; POPCORN BY **JASON DOIY**



2000

Shoppers Drug Mart's **Optimum** program launches. It attracts four million members in the first three months.

2007

Scene card launched by Scotiabank and Cineplex.

2009

Starbucks Canada's **Rewards** loyalty card debuts.

2013

Loblaw introduces **PC Plus**—the "first all-digital intelligent retail loyalty program designed for delivery on a smartphone."

2016

Société des alcools du Québec (SAQ)'s **Inspire** loyalty program launches; 1.2 million members sign up within the first two months.

2018

After buying Shoppers Drug Mart, Loblaw combines Optimum and PC Points reward programs into **PC Optimum**.

2019

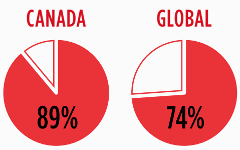
Tim Hortons' **Rewards** program debuts.

2021

In an effort to boost customer retention, Ford launches its **FordPass Rewards** program in Canada; 200,000 members enroll within the first two weeks.

Canadians are the most loyal of loyalty program users

ENROLLED IN 1–10+ LOYALTY PROGRAMS



+38% INCREASE IN CANADIAN LOYALTY MEMBERSHIPS SINCE 2014

$16 BILLION

ESTIMATED VALUE OF UNREDEEMED LOYALTY POINTS*

*AMONG CANADIAN LOYALTY PROGRAM USERS IN 2017

13

AVERAGE LOYALTY PROGRAM MEMBERSHIPS FOR CANADIANS

SOURCES: BOND LOYALTY REPORT 2020; THE TRUTH ABOUT CUSTOMER LOYALTY 2019, KPMG; REDEFINING CUSTOMER LOYALTY: BEYOND THE POINTS 2020, KPMG; COLLOQUY LOYALTY CENSUS; R3 MARKETING; LEGER.

EXPLAINER

THE 411 ON NFTs

Art and commerce collide to create the latest crypto craze **BY DAVE ZARUM**

First things first: NFT stands for non-fungible token (fungible meaning interchangeable or replaceable by another item).

Now that we've established that, NFTs are unique digital assets that are being bought and sold. And they've been an investing craze during much of the first half of 2021.

The most common realm in which NFTs are being traded is within digital art, where images, GIFs and other digital files become one-of-a-kind collector's items.

NFTs were initially meant to help protect digital artists and provide an avenue for monetizing their works; creators like Mike Winkelmann (a.ka. Beeple), who recently sold an NFT for more than US$69 million. But Beeple is an anomaly in a space in danger of being overtaken by the corporate world; toilet paper brand Charmin recently announced it would be selling NFTs (or NF*TP*s as it has cheekily called them), albeit with proceeds going to charity.

NFTs are collected and traded in the same vein as traditional art pieces, with the exception of one detail: they don't physically exist. As is the case with artists' prints—that Charles Pachter piece hanging in your office, say—there can be replica NFTs, but only one original. NFT transactions are often administered via peer-to-peer networking blockchain technology, like Bitcoin or Ethereum.

Fascinating on their own, NFTs' place in a greater trend is what makes them particularly notable.

"NFTs are part of a broader movement happening with crypto adoption," says Ryan Leopold, partner, national banking and capital markets assurance leader at PwC Canada. "As the markets continue to get more comfortable with the crypto concept, you will likely see other asset classes, such as real estate, join the tokenization trend."

That bigger picture is what makes the NFT craze important to understand not only today, but also as their popularity will inevitably lead to standards and government or professional regulations.

"We are in the early days of regulatory and policy development," Leopold says. "Regulators have a significant job ahead: they need to find the right way to regulate these emerging technologies without stifling innovation." ◆

▲

EVERYDAYS: THE FIRST 5,000 DAYS
Beeple (graphic designer)

US$69.4 MILLION

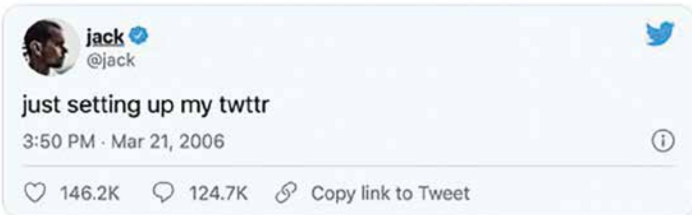
The collage image file was sold by Christie's auction house after receiving more than 180 bids.

LEBRON JAMES COSMIC SERIES 1, #29

US$280,000

NBA Top Shot digital video highlight "card." Developed by Vancouver-based Dapper Labs, which recently landed a US$305-million investment from a group including Michael Jordan and current NBA stars Kevin Durant and Kyle Lowry.

▼



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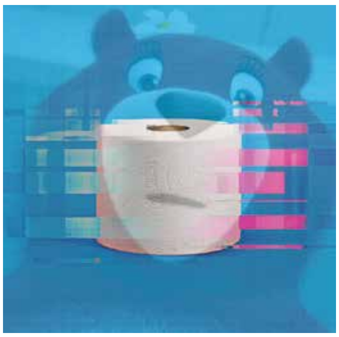
TWITTER FOUNDER JACK DORSEY'S FIRST TWEET

US$2.9 MILLION

"This is not just a tweet!" the buyer, Bridge Oracle executive Sina Estavi, wrote. "I think years later people will realize the true value of this tweet, like the *Mona Lisa* painting."



▲

NFTP #005
Charmin

US$1,606

NYAN CAT

US$531,000

A pixelated cat with a Pop-Tart for a torso featured in a 2011 YouTube video.

▼

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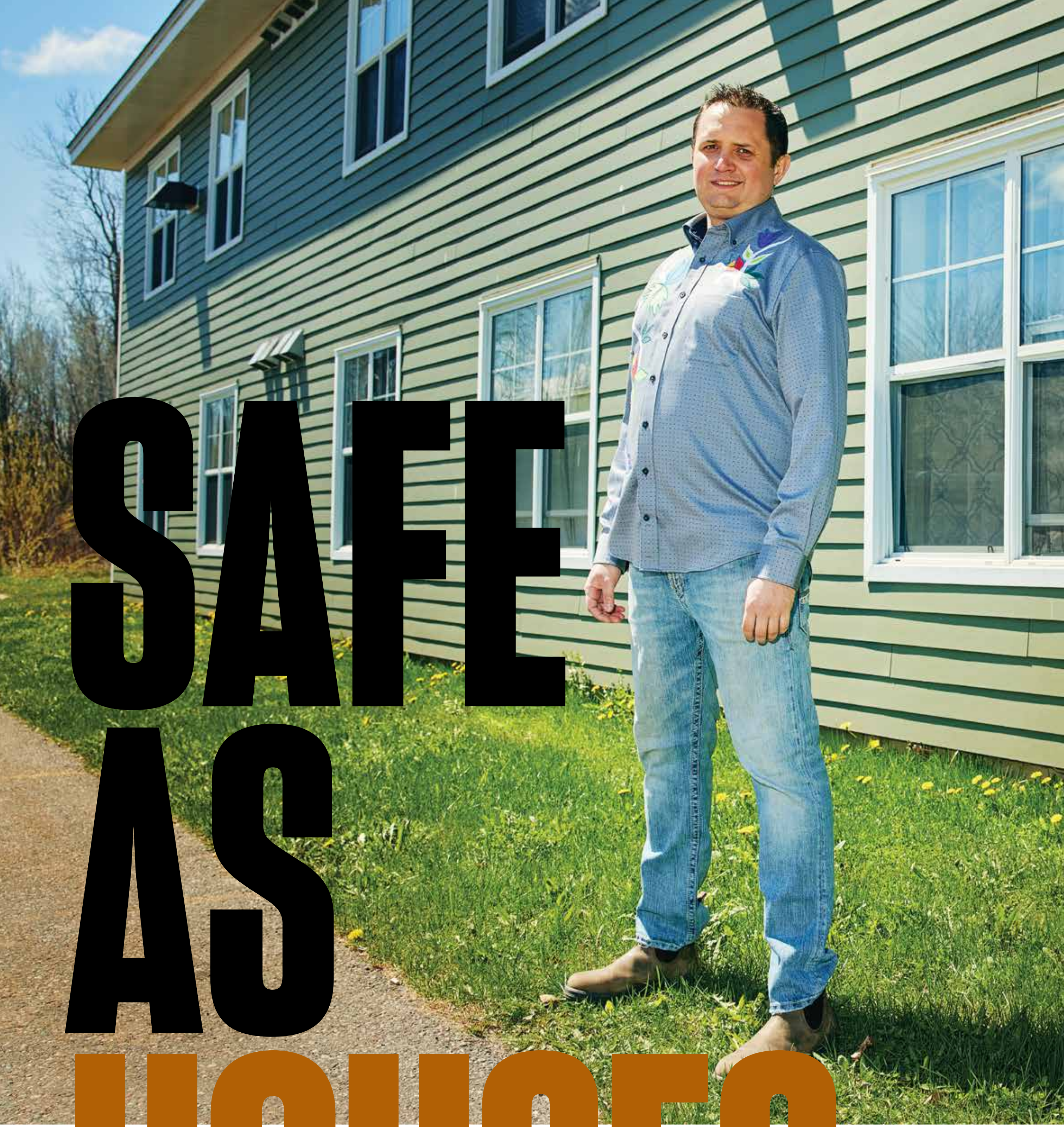


SAFE AS HOUSES

Outside a Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. apartment complex acquired by OAHS through its partnership with Neech-ke-Wehn Homes, a local housing provider

Many Indigenous people don't have an affordable place to call home. CPA Justin Marchand is fighting to change that

BY LUC RINALDI

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL EHRENWORTH

THE SMALL TOWN of Sioux Lookout, Ont., sits halfway between Thunder Bay and Winnipeg, enveloped by picturesque lakes, dense forest and the Canadian Shield. It's home to roughly 5,000 people and the Sioux Lookout Airport, a hub for travellers flying between southern cities and remote northern communities.

In late 2015, as temperatures crept below freezing, a chief from a First Nations community asked the town's mayor, Doug Lawrance, whether he could house two of its members who had moved to Sioux Lookout but had nowhere to stay. Lawrance called a handful of local housing agencies, but none had room; they were already struggling to find beds for dozens of people, most of them Indigenous. "There were just no solutions," Lawrance said at the time. So he wrote to the provincial ministry responsible for housing, pleading for help. "The need is incredible."

Sioux Lookout is a microcosm of the housing crisis facing Indigenous people across the country. Adequate housing is essential for stability, and yet, despite accounting for only 4.9 per cent of the population, Indigenous people are disproportionately represented among Canada's unhoused, and they're more likely to live in precarious housing. Inadequate housing is often at the root of their over-representation in foster care and prison, and housing is mentioned nearly 300 times in the final report prepared by the National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Indigenous people are also more likely to be unemployed; it's difficult to find a job when you live in your car. "If you don't have your foundational needs met—one of them being shelter—nothing else can really thrive," says Margaret Pfoh, CEO of the Aboriginal Housing Management Association, an umbrella organization of Indigenous housing and service providers in B.C. "Without housing, how can we focus on education, on health, on reuniting families?"

In response to Lawrance's letter and similar requests for help from the social housing agency in the area, Justin Marchand flew to Sioux Lookout in 2016. At the time, Marchand, a CPA, was the director of operations for Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS), a non-profit based in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., that provides shelter, affordable rentals, home-ownership programs and support services to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It's Ontario's largest Indigenous housing provider. "If somebody comes through the door and needs help, we help them," he says.

Marchand, who identifies as Métis with Algonquin and Mi'kmaq ancestry, is 41, with short dark hair and a relaxed grin. He arrived in Sioux Lookout accompanied by his boss, Don McBain, who'd founded OAHS in 1994 and was revered for his unwavering dedication to Indigenous housing. They intended to develop and build a permanent, 20-unit supportive housing complex that could help people get off the street and transition into stable housing.

It was no simple task. McBain and Marchand spent months tirelessly brokering agreements among the municipality, the district services board, and the provincial and federal governments. Blowback from the local communities only made the job harder. Incidents involving Sioux Lookout's unhoused—violence, disturbances, overdoses—were taxing the town's police, paramedics and hospitals, and some locals opposed the idea of spending more tax dollars on Indigenous support.

"There was a bit of hesitation, to put it politely, about us building housing for *those people*," says Marchand. But to him, the project was simply the right thing to do, both morally and financially. "Do we want to spend more than $180,000 a year housing someone [in prison] who's not supposed to be there, with no support once they leave? Or should we be proactive and spend less than 10 per cent of that on housing so they don't end up in jail?"

In September 2017, shovels hit ground. It should have been cause for celebration but, that same week, tragedy struck. After a brief battle with cancer, Don McBain died. He was 58. "Everyone was caught off guard," says Marchand, who used to joke that McBain would never retire. "He always said he was going to be working three weeks after he died, from the other side."

Still grieving his friend and mentor, Marchand stepped into McBain's shoes. As OAHS's new executive director, he inherited not just the Sioux Lookout development, but many others like it. "I can't overstate how difficult a time that was," he says. His phone rang constantly; his email inbox overflowed. He lost sleep, working nights and

"We need to get onto a path of reconciliaton," Marchand says. "It's time to start taking the first steps."

◀ **Speaking at a housing project announcement in Sturgeon Falls, Ont.**

▼ **Marchand at an OAHS housing development in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.**

weekends. The organization was overwhelmed and underfunded. It manages 2,400 units across the province and is developing thousands more to keep up with demand. As of June, OAHS had 6,000 housing applications on their waitlist. The backlog of requests for repairs and renovations is even longer. "We just can't meet the need," says Marchand. "We have the systems . . . and I know we could ramp up quickly if the resources were behind us."

Over the last few years, Marchand has been fighting for those resources, meeting with federal and provincial lawmakers and lobbying for equitable policy. In the mould of his late boss, he has become an unrelenting champion for Indigenous housing. He sees his work as a way to begin healing the damage done by colonization, residential schools and the Sixties Scoop—all of which inflicted trauma that has passed down through generations of Indigenous people. "We've been told we need to get onto a path of reconciliation," he says. "It's time to start taking the first steps."

UNDER MARCHAND'S leadership, OAHS is bigger and better funded than ever. It has 110 employees, compared to 38 when he started, and he managed to negotiate a funding increase when the province was slashing nearly everything else. Still, Marchand is quick to deflect credit. "A lot of the things we've accomplished in the last three and a half years, they are still things that Don had his fingers on," he says. Once, a few minutes after we finished speaking about the organization's growth, he emailed me: "Everything we do here is a team effort . . . just wanted to make sure that's clear."

Emily Sayers, a CPA student and financial analyst for OAHS, told me that Marchand's passion for Indigenous housing is infectious and inspiring. "Justin reminds us why we're here and that the work we're doing is so important," she says. "I may not ever see the person who lives in one of our homes, but I'm still contributing to the whole picture. He reminds us of that all the time."

Marchand never intended to work in housing. In fact, growing up in and around Sault Ste. Marie, where he lives now, he didn't know exactly what he wanted to do—just that he wanted to help people. He was good with numbers, so he studied commerce and accounting at the University of Ottawa before pursuing his professional accounting designation. "I didn't have a set career path in mind, but I knew that when the right thing came along, the accounting education and training was going to be so helpful," he says. "I can't say enough about the business perspective it provided."

Throughout the 2000s, Marchand worked as a staff accountant for KPMG, an analyst for Algoma Steel and an audit specialist at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation. In 2009, Marchand saw an opening at OAHS, which piqued his interest. "I'd always wanted to use my appreciation for numbers for the greater good," he says. Once on the job, "I fell in love with the organization, its mission and its vision."

Now executive director, he says his CPA training helps him measure the outcomes of the housing OAHS provides, such as savings in law enforcement and health care costs. "If you can shine a light on that data, all of a sudden you get these strange alliances between property taxpayers, business owners and a non-profit Indigenous housing organization," he says.

Working in housing can be dispiriting—there are always more heads than beds. But, when Marchand assumed the top job at OAHS in 2017, he and other Indigenous housing leaders had reason to be hopeful. The federal government had promised it would develop a housing strategy specifically tailored to the Indigenous people who don't live on reserve, the demographic served by OAHS and other agencies like it. But, that November, when the federal government announced the National Housing Strategy—a multi-billion-dollar plan intended to ensure every Canadian has a safe, affordable place to live—there was no sign of the promised legislation vis-à-vis Indigenous housing.

"We all felt blindsided," says Marchand. In a statement, a spokesperson for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation said, "There remains a strong need for an urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing strategy to fill critical gaps."

In the months following the announcement, Marchand conferred with members of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association's Indigenous Caucus, a body that acts as a unified voice for Indigenous housing providers nationwide. If the government wouldn't develop policy that included them, they would create their own.

In 2018, Marchand and the rest of the caucus proposed a "for Indigenous, by Indigenous" housing strategy, arguing that they, not government, were in the best position to provide housing and related services to Indigenous communities. "It's more than just putting a roof over somebody's head. It's understanding that a lot of our people, in their reconnecting to their roots, are implementing a lifestyle unique to Indigenous peoples, whether that's fishing, hunting or intergenerational family structures," says Pfoh, a member of the caucus. "We understand what we need to help our communities survive and thrive, because we've been doing it for 50 years."

The cornerstone of the caucus's proposal is the creation of an Indigenous housing centre, a national body designed, owned and operated by Indigenous people. The centre would manage all funding and data for new Indigenous housing initiatives and provide low-interest loans and grants aimed at eliminating the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people's housing needs. The strategy would formally give Indigenous people self-determination over their own social housing, something the federal government has never granted. "There was a time when government would say, 'We're not letting Indigenous people take this money; we're going to keep our foot on their neck, watch every penny and scrutinize everything they do,'" says Kevin Albers, a CPA and the CEO of the M'akola Housing Society, an agency in B.C.

▲ Marchand continues to push for a national Indigenous housing strategy

Earlier this year, it looked like that might finally change. In February, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance recommended that the 2021 federal budget include the creation of a "for Indigenous, by Indigenous" housing strategy, the very thing the caucus had proposed. "Government is finally demonstrating faith in the Indigenous community to be the solution for its own people," Albers, also a member of the caucus, said at the time.

When the budget was unveiled, however, the Indigenous housing strategy was once again absent. "Huge, huge disappointment doesn't even begin to describe that miss," says Marchand. He doesn't interpret the decision as a defeat, just a delay. "We aren't letting down."

In April, Marchand was elected chair of the Indigenous Caucus. In this role, he'll be leading the charge for an Indigenous housing strategy. He is characteristically deferential about his new position, insisting that the caucus is and will continue to be a group effort. "Justin is a leader among leaders," says Albers. "We have complete confidence in him to help us get across the finish line."

A **FEDERAL INDIGENOUS** housing policy may take years to develop and finalize in government. Thanks to the pandemic, however, the need is more urgent than ever. Housing experts say that more people are on the streets than ever before, avoiding shelters out of fear of infection (in Toronto alone, more than 1,000 COVID-19 cases have been linked to outbreaks in shelters). Many others have lost their jobs and are now at risk of losing their apartments or houses. "We're worried about the wave of coming evictions—the people who worked in restaurants and other low- to middle-income jobs," says Marchand. He estimates Ontario's Indigenous population will need another 22,000 safe, affordable homes in the coming years, which will cost billions to build.

The supportive housing that OAHS developed in Sioux Lookout has made a small but meaningful dent in that need. When it opened its doors in 2018, staff matched the new residents with caseworkers, taught them money management and job training skills, and provided addiction and mental health supports to those who needed them. Within six months, the number of 9-1-1 calls in Sioux Lookout—which had mostly concerned the same two dozen unhoused individuals—dropped by 90 per cent, and the town began saving hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars per year. "Now we've got the local property-owner tax base thrilled that we're saving them all kinds of money," says Marchand. "They want us to build more housing."

Marchand never intended to work in housing. He just knew he wanted to help people.

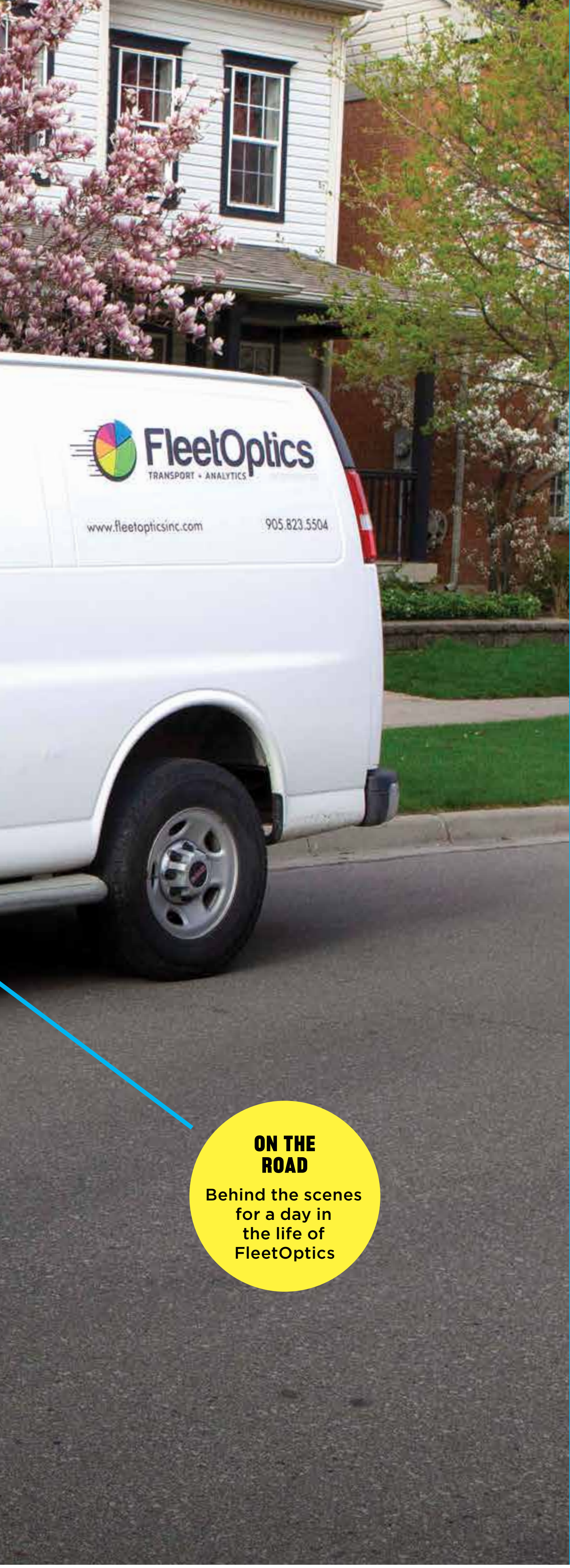
The benefits for the residents go beyond dollars and cents. Some of them have since moved into stable housing, on their way to escaping the cycle of poverty. "People may not understand, we didn't choose to be homeless," one resident said. "Just having the security of knowing I can come to my home... It's a relief to have. It's a blessing." ◆

BY SARAH LISS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY AARON WYNIA

STAND AND DELIVER

Every day, the delivery disruptor FleetOptics shuttles 50,000 packages from retail fulfillment centres into customers' hands. Meet e-commerce's secret weapon



ON THE ROAD

Behind the scenes for a day in the life of FleetOptics

In March 2020, as the threat of COVID-19 escalated, cities around the world turned into ghost towns. With lockdowns in place, we huddled at home, reduced to blinking dots on a Google map, separated not just from each other, but from essential commodities, For some, these consumer-based challenges weren't just a matter of convenience, but of life and death—if you were elderly or immunocompromised, your distance from the pharmacy could keep you from necessary medication and supplies.

As those days stretched into months, even as traffic in general slowed to a trickle, a certain kind of vehicle became a familiar sight on streets throughout Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver: a white cube van, cheery rainbow pie chart emblazoned on its side, occupying a curbside spot for the duration of a quick dash between the driver's seat and a nearby front door. They ferried mascara, textbooks, antihistamines, coffee makers. These unassuming vans were the fastest connection between store and customer, the solution to the problem of how to get everyday essentials from their points of origin to the people who needed them most. They were the connective tissue between all those blinking dots on Google maps, a lifeline during a once-in-a-lifetime crisis.

The company behind those vehicles is FleetOptics, which bills itself as the Uber of parcel delivery. Over the past six years, FleetOptics has built up its reputation by mastering what's known as "final-mile" logistics—in essence, the business of figuring out how to get purchases from retail depots into customers' eager hands. At a time when online shopping is not just an option, but a necessity, FleetOptics' services have never been in greater demand. It doesn't hurt that one of its key clients is Amazon, whose Prime service requires a hefty reliance on local contractors. In three years, FleetOptics' revenue has grown by 297 per cent.

6:00AM

OAKVILLE, ONT. SORTING FACILITY

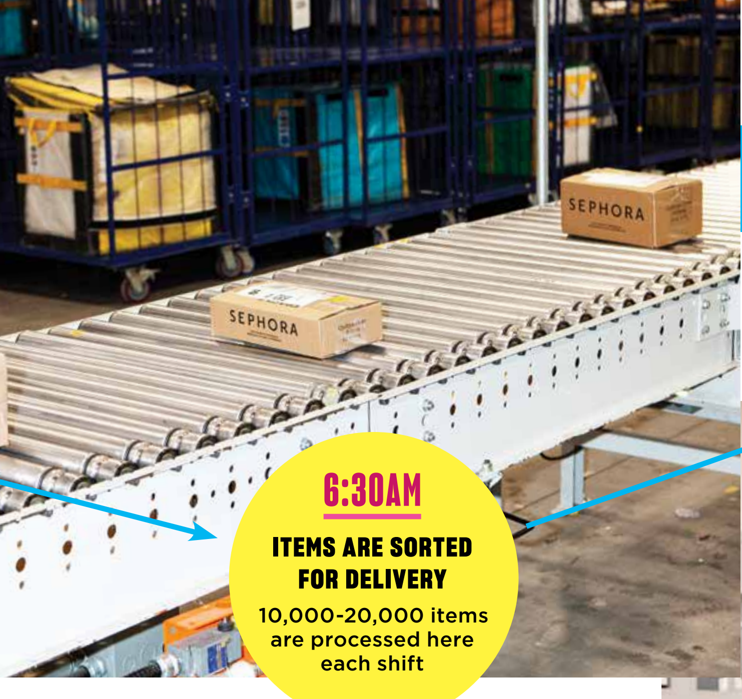
FleetOptics also has a 25,000-square-foot facility in Mississauga, Ont.

Two years ago, before we were riding out stay-at-home orders, FleetOptics bet on e-commerce. It was a smart gamble: last year, e-commerce sales reached $52.04 billion—a jump of nearly $10 billion year over year. Now experts expect the sector will generate more than $72 billion in sales by 2023. Compared to conventional retail, online shopping involves more heavy lifting on the part of the seller. By combining tracking technology, huge capacity and specialized local knowledge, FleetOptics found a way to lighten that load.

FleetOptics was founded in 2015 by John Mann, a veteran of the transport industry, and his friend Vince Buckley, whose family has been in the business for four generations. (Buckley Cartage, their trucking company, dates back to the '50s). The two met in the '80s while attending the University of Windsor, and they complement each other nicely: the silver-bearded Buckley is garrulous and outgoing, while Mann is clean-cut and compact, with the reassuring air of a problem-solver. They were already working together at Agile Logistics, a company that helped domestic and international transportation and freight companies streamline their processes. (They remain managing partners of that enterprise as well.) Piggybacking on their experience with Agile Logistics, they originally founded FleetOptics as a B2B solution, ferrying merchandise to retailers from its point of origin.

By 2018, they'd already started working with large retailers, shifting away from B2B and toward consumer deliveries. The turning point, Buckley and Mann say, came that year when Canada Post workers launched a series of rotating strikes that slowed mail deliveries across the country to a glacial pace, just as the holidays were approaching. As millions of Canadians waited for parcels that remained stubbornly stuck, FleetOptics quietly stepped up to help fill the gap.

"We had just enough space at our facility," Buckley recalls. "We were just packed in. I felt really bad for our sorters. That was the real a-ha moment." All of a sudden, FleetOptics was on the precipice of a major expansion—business as they knew it was about to explode. "We realized, 'Oh my God, we've got to get a bigger place!'" They quickly upgraded from



6:30AM

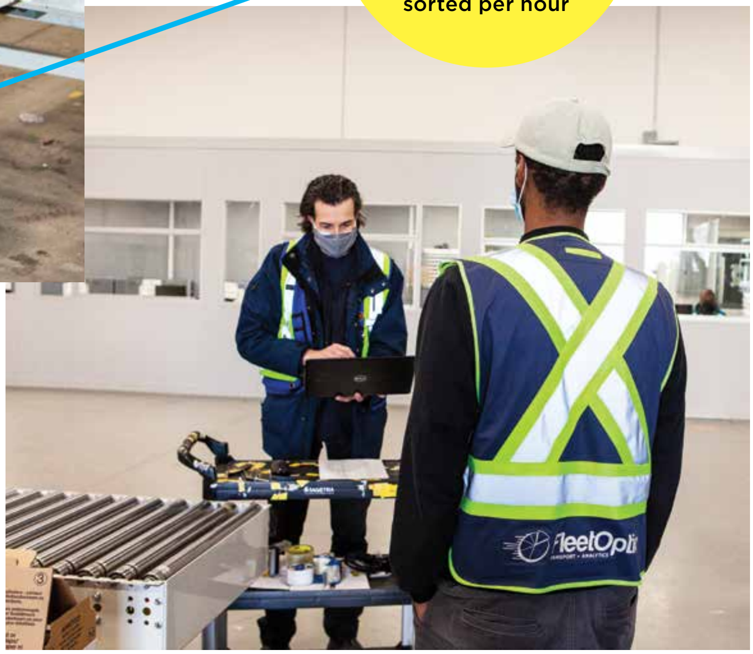
ITEMS ARE SORTED FOR DELIVERY

10,000-20,000 items are processed here each shift

7:00AM

DRIVERS RECEIVE THEIR ROUTE NUMBER

As many as 4,000 packages can be sorted per hour



a 1,500-square-foot unit to a 25,000-square-foot facility in Mississauga, Ont. and doubled down on technology and machinery to bolster efficiency.

It was around then that Mike Kee, a CPA, left his role at Sobeys to join FleetOptics as the company's director of finance. (His relationship with Buckley goes back to the early aughts, when he'd been a manager of finance and admin at Buckley Cartage.) "Amazon was just starting to come on board and so was business-to-consumer retail—but just in a trickle," he says. "The key was recognizing the potential for growth in e-commerce, and I think John and Vince could really see it coming. We're riding that wave now."

The trick was to build on a relatively old-school industry (logistics—the complex dance of getting things from one place to another) using a relatively new innovation (agile technology that links drivers' real-time GPS info with back-end systems). And, for that, FleetOptics had a secret weapon: it developed a deceptively simple app that tracks the exact location of every shipment and offers an estimate of when the item will be delivered. Compared to Canada Post's fuzzy delivery forecasts, the FleetOptics approach can assuage the frustration of consumers wondering exactly where parcels have landed. For retailers, having easy access to package-status data can reduce customer service costs. That technology was based on Mann and Buckley's experience with "the shortcomings of legacy carriers' technology."

Here's how their business works. Let's say you need laundry detergent and, happily, manage to find the exact brand you like on Amazon. You click on the button that triggers a Prime two-day delivery. If you're lucky, that detergent has already travelled on a truck from the manufacturer to its temporary home in a massive Amazon warehouse within driving distance of your home, called a fulfillment centre. The information from your order might trigger a wheeled robot in that warehouse to locate the shelf where the Tide pods are housed and carry the shelf to a worker, who selects the item, scans it and sends it to be packed up for shipping. FleetOptics handles the last bit: its people retrieve your detergent (along with any other Amazon orders headed out for delivery) and bring them to the FleetOptics facility, where shipments are divvied up according to local routes. From there, a driver loads the pods in her van, drives through the city and deposits them on your doormat. Miraculously, the entire process only takes a matter of hours.

Online purchases surged during the early days of the pandemic; Mann describes that period as "a blur." The company mobilized around trying to fulfill next-day delivery commitments, quickly tripling its fleet of drivers from 100 to 350. One example stands out: in Vancouver, during a weather delay, a facility supervisor stepped up to personally ferry packages on Christmas Day so nobody would be left waiting for presents that never arrived. Pandemic-related restrictions, of course, have intensified urgent demands: when your home-schooling kid discovers she desperately needs craft supplies for a virtual class project tomorrow, you

7:30AM
LOADING PACKAGES FOR EASY ACCESS

8:00AM
EN ROUTE TO THE FIRST DELIVERY
There are 80-100 routes active each day

need to find a way to get those items into her hands without leaving your house. A recent report from Shopify found that nearly half of global consumers will be shopping online more frequently once the pandemic is over, and that the same-day delivery market will reach nearly $10 billion in 2022.

For FleetOptics, increased consumer demand for speedy deliveries has resulted in tremendous growth. They saw revenues jump from $65,000 in 2015 to $24.2 million in 2019. Thanks to the pandemic, 2020 was a banner year, earning the company $43.5 million. The first two months of 2021 were even more remarkable, with revenues up more than 100 per cent year over year.

Dispatcher Paul Cimoroni witnessed that growth firsthand. He joined the company about three years back, working first as a driver and then as a sorter in the flow-through facility. Back then, he says, he and his colleagues were delivering maybe 500 to 1,000 packages per day—and all of those were sorted by hand. Now, he says, he's overseeing 10,000 to 20,000 packages per day, which are, happily, batched and routed using well-calibrated computer systems.

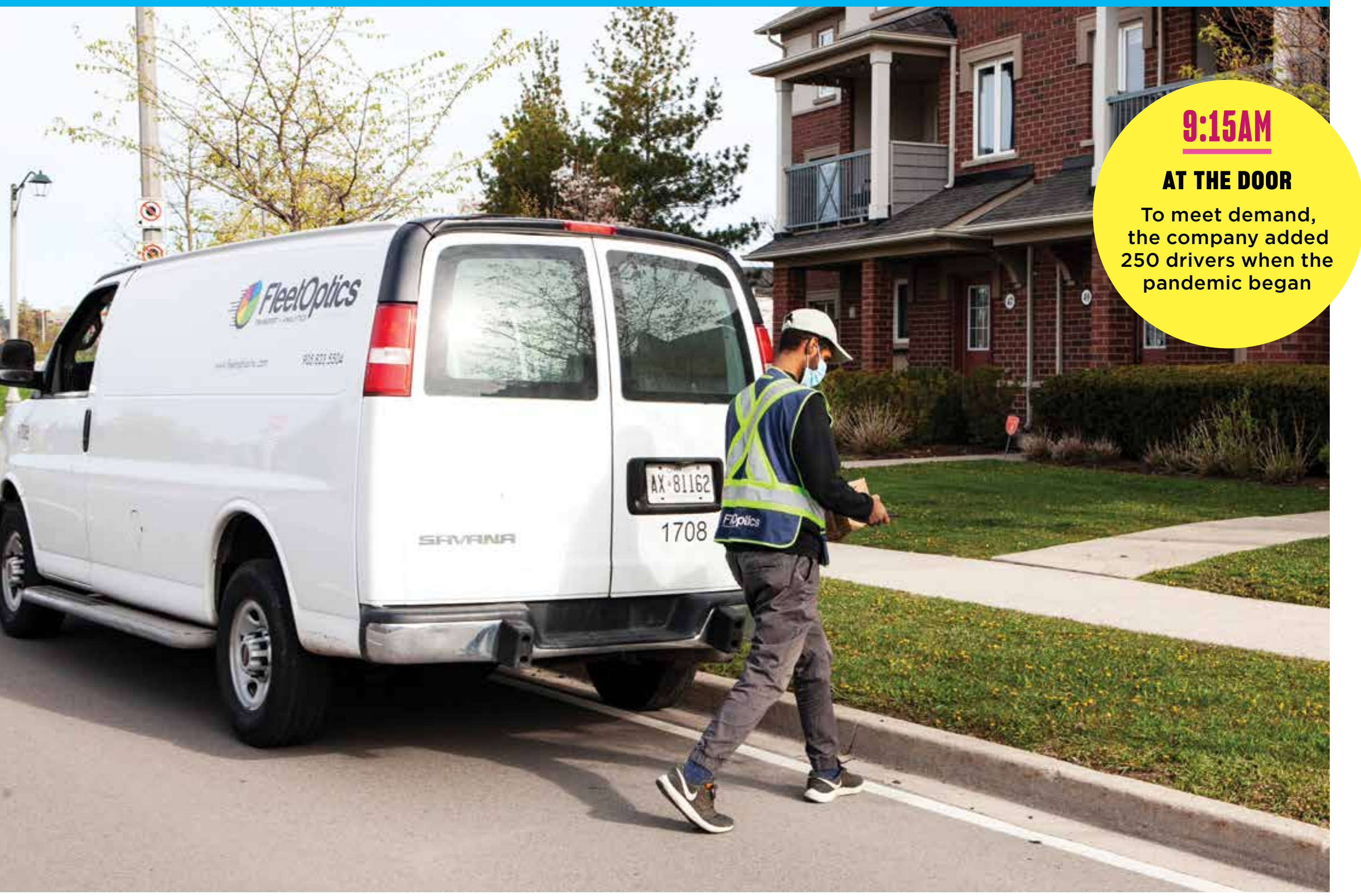
As of April 2021, FleetOptics has some 350 drivers who deliver around 50,000 packages a day. "When I first started," says Cimoroni, "it was myself and a colleague, literally going through skids of packages. We'd pull one marked M6H and put it on a skid and then sort it with other ones in the same postal code. Obviously, you just can't do that when you have the number of packages we're going through." Now, FleetOptics uses its in-house system to scan and organize packages, which are sorted into rolling carts, which in turn are scanned and assigned to particular routes. These days, when Cimoroni arrives at the facility around 5:30 a.m., he assesses the schedule. Typically, they'll have 80 to 100 routes lined up, each of which corresponds to an individual driver. In the past, all those drivers would likely have showed up at the facility at once; now, they schedule waves of about 25 to 30. As each driver arrives, they receive their route numbers and proceed to correspondingly numbered racks where they collect their packages.

While COVID-19 has been beneficial for large retailers, it presents its own set of logistical challenges. FleetOptics reconfigured its conveyor system, to allow for more space between sorters (who wound up having to work longer hours). It implemented strict protocols around daily temperature checks, masks, face shields and social distancing, and drivers are no longer required to obtain signatures upon delivery, to limit interaction with customers.

So far this year, it's only experienced six cases of COVID-19 in a company of 450 employees.

Tania Correia, a driver who's been working for the company since October 2020, is a parent to a school-aged child. She says the company's flexibility in terms of shifts and other time-sensitive accommodations has been a tremendous perk. Correia wakes up at 4:50 so she can arrive at the sorting facility 15 minutes before her 6 a.m. shift. Once she receives her route number, she finds the numbered cart that holds the packages she's responsible for transporting, loads up her vehicle, paying Tetris-like attention to how she's arranging items based on the order in which she plans to deliver them. Then she grabs a tracking device and hits the road. COVID-19 has shifted traffic patterns, she says—which is a boon, since she and her colleagues have more items to deliver than ever before. And it's changed their relationships with the people receiving their deliveries. "Some people are very afraid of opening the door," she says. "I get it—I can feel that way, too. I mean, we're not expecting to get a hug but, unfortunately, it's sometimes required for them to take the package in hand." But the positive experiences balance out the negative ones. She's seen houses where people have left out drinks and snacks as a token of appreciation. "It's so nice to see those things, even if we don't actually take them." And, in some cases, a driver dropping off a package becomes a kind of lifeline to the outside world. "A couple of days ago, I made a delivery to a woman who hadn't been out of her house at all," Correia says. "She was like, 'Oh my god, it's so nice to see a person!' "

Like a shark, a business must move forward to survive. One of the challenges right now, Kee says, is that business trends are following more of a shark-fin model, rather than a bell curve—that is, rather than a steady climb, followed by a rolling peak and a gentle descent, demand for particular products or ideas are arcing upward and then rapidly plummeting down. "In other words," he says, "whatever you offer, it's only got so much of a life."

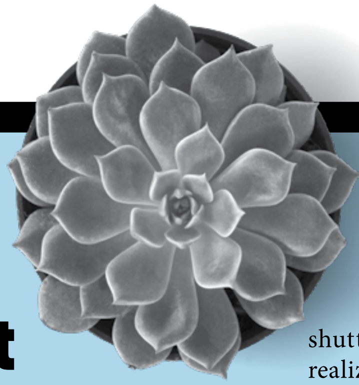


That means, more than ever, companies—FleetOptics among them—have less time to anticipate their next move. It means they constantly have to add value to what they're already doing, to convince new clients to choose them over another final-mile service. This might mean, for example, turning their delivery vans into mobile marketing tools by offering a full billboard-style wrap—as with Sephora, whose beautifully packaged cosmetics arrive at customers' homes by way of Sephora-branded vehicles.

The company's tech-savvy approach has thus far led to exponential growth—and not just in revenue. Over the past year, the Mississauga-based operation has expanded into several key markets across the country, setting up flow-through facilities of 22,000-square-feet apiece in Vancouver and Montreal; Mann says they're poised to open shop in Ottawa and Calgary later in 2021. "There's not a lot of overhead or fixed costs to doing this," offers Kee, who, as a CPA, is focused on the bottom line. He says he's looking at the revenue margin per account per site on a weekly basis. That lean, mean approach helps offset the risk involved in scaling up: the company can easily expand and contract its fleet of contractors to reflect demand.

But being able to sustain that growth, says Kee, also means looking at the other piece of the FleetOptics puzzle—in addition to its core business of delivering packages, the company has also invested time and money into developing software that allows parties on all sides to meticulously track that process. "We need to continue to develop that, to integrate it more with back-office systems," Kee says. The company might expand the features it offers via the FleetOptics app—could retailers or purchasers someday have the opportunity to watch while a driver makes his way up onto the porch and, via text message, direct him to leave the package in a specific spot in real time? It also might mean doubling down on sustainability, Mann says. "Our goal is to focus on a strategy to continue to reduce our carbon footprint as more electric vehicles become available." AI will be part of that strategy, he adds. "But I'm not so sure about drones." ◆

REMOTE CONTROL



In a time without offices, accounting firms are embracing virtual audits, global Zoom meetings and drone-enabled inventory counts. Welcome to the new mobile work economy

BY MATT O'GRADY

At True North Accounting in Calgary, March 18, 2020 was supposed to be a day of celebration. The six-year-old firm was set to open its brand-new offices in Bridgeland, a vibrant, mixed-use neighbourhood in the city's northeast quadrant, just across the Reconciliation Bridge from downtown.

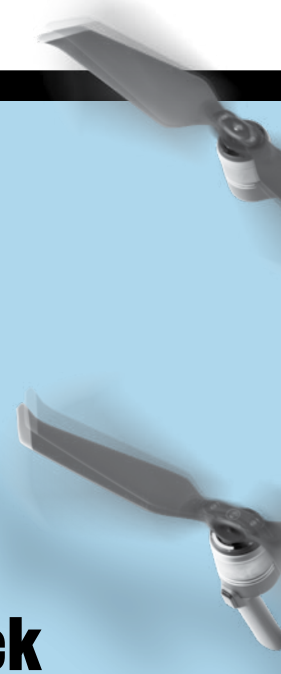
In the weeks leading up to the opening, Matt Peterson, a CPA and co-owner of True North, was one of only a handful of employees working out of the Bridgeland office, which was still a construction zone. But, as the big day approached, he got nervous, watching news of the pandemic unfolding around the world. The NBA stopped playing. Broadway went dark. Stores and restaurants and gyms shuttered their doors. And, pretty soon, Peterson realized his grand opening wasn't going to happen.

On March 16, he sent out an email to all his clients, breaking the news that the firm's offices in Calgary and Okotoks, Alta., were going to be closing indefinitely. True North deals primarily with small businesses, and tax season was on the horizon. He knew the coming months were going to be busy, so he also detailed the new digital documentation and authorization tools that clients would need.

For many clients, the transition was fairly smooth. For Peterson and his co-owner, Curtis Gabinet, it was a mad scramble. They had to prepare 11 employees across two offices for a rapid remote makeover. Over the course of the next 72 hours, Peterson and Gabinet assumed the role of deliverymen, shuttling VoIP phones, monitors, headsets and chairs from offices to employees' homes. At the last minute, anticipating the need for virtual meetings, Peterson went in search of webcams, which were suddenly in short supply. "On Sunday afternoon, I went to maybe 10 different stores. I looked everywhere," he recalls. Finally, he was able to secure a box of old webcams from a woman on Kijiji. "Adopting all this technology was a three-year plan that got fast-forwarded to three weeks."

Over the past year, the pandemic has forced companies to reimagine how—and where—they do their business. For smaller firms like True North, whose clients include ranchers, plumbers, and contractors in the oil and gas sector, that meant rapid-fire adoption of various digital accounting and collaboration tools.

Larger firms, however, were blessed with most of that infrastructure already. "We were on the road to more remote, more flexible, more digitized work," says Chris Dulny, PwC Canada's chief innovation officer. PwC moved quickly: as soon as employees left the building in March 2020, the company started ripping out landlines, removing printers and selling off storage cabinets from its 26-storey Toronto headquarters. It quickly adopted a hotelling model, reconfiguring the space to allow for more flexible work and social distancing. "When you move into something as game-changing as the pandemic, you look around and say, 'What can we accelerate?'" Dulny says. "We don't need people coming back to an office and owning space and printing paper and not getting that data into our digital tools."



The pandemic has sparked a massive office exodus in the business world. As of the fourth quarter of 2020, downtown Toronto's office vacancy rate had soared to 7.2 per cent, according to realtor CBRE, up from two per cent pre-COVID. By early 2021, Bay Street firms were giving up square footage—including Scotiabank, which is vacating the top floors of its rental space in 2023, and Power Corp., which will leave its Brookfield Place penthouse in 2024. As Shopify CEO Tobias Lütke tweeted, "Office centricity is over."

While all of the accounting firms *Pivot* spoke to indicated they would not be reducing their office footprint, there's little doubt that COVID-19 will fundamentally reshape what they do with it. Each said a variation on the same thing: when it's safe to do so, we will return to the office. Just not all of us—and not in the same ways we used to.

Geoffrey Leonardelli, a professor of organizational behaviour and human resource management at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, thinks the corporate office, in some form, is here to stay. "For people who negotiate on a regular basis, who find personal interaction useful for building trust, there will be a time and place for space."

"We don't need people coming back to an office and owning space and printing paper and not getting that data into our digital tools," says PwC's Chris Dulny

For many big Canadian firms, the shift to remote work was less of a leap, more of a hop. "Obviously, moving 8,000 employees virtual overnight—which is pretty much what we did in March 2020—was not something we envisioned ever doing," says Silvia Montefiore, KPMG's Canadian managing partner for business enablement and operations, who led her organization's pandemic response team. "But even before COVID, we had some employees who worked a large part of the week from home."

The majority of KPMG employees already had company laptops and second monitors at home, so little technology was required to get employees set up remotely. Serendipitously, in fall 2019, the firm had also made major tech investments, upgrading its servers and launching the Microsoft Teams platform. With Teams Live, KPMG has been able to host monthly town halls with 8,000-plus staff across 40 offices, says Montefiore: "Pre-COVID, we would never have been able to do this."

While KPMG managers may have been familiar with these collaborative tools, putting them to use in a virtual office setting—with direct reports stuck behind a webcam, sitting at their kitchen tables—was another matter. The company developed a Digital Now training program in the wake of the first lockdown, using the educational platform Degreed to help leaders who might need support on how to manage a team virtually.

At smaller firms like True North, some people are eager to return to normal—and leave their screens behind. Despite Matt Peterson's best efforts, not all of his employees were equipped to go remote in March 2020. "One of our team members lives on an acreage outside of Okotoks," he says. "She has rural internet, and everything we do is on the cloud,

so she couldn't work." That employee comes in every day to the office, where she works alone.

In Vancouver, meanwhile, Manning Elliott LLP discovered its problem during the initial lockdown wasn't technological so much as social. "We were cognizant of the isolation felt by new staff when things went remote, so we tried to find ways to keep people feeling integrated," says Adam Denny, a partner at the firm that has a large private-company practice as well as public clients in some of B.C.'s high-growth sectors like cannabis and blockchain.

To combat the isolation, Manning Elliott instituted a series of online socials, including Friday Zoom drinks with groups of six to eight employees. The firm also instituted a system of buddies and mentors to make sure there was a constant connection between employees. Even so, they found that online camaraderie couldn't compare to the real thing. Two months after the first lockdown, once health protocols were in place, staff began returning to the office; by early 2021, 50 per cent were back in Manning Elliott's four locations.

KPMG was able to hold virtual town halls with **8,000** employees across 40 offices

For some, it was a practical matter—employees with young children who struggled to work from home—but others simply wanted to re-establish routines and collaborate with colleagues. And while Zoom meetings might permanently replace some business travel going forward, says Denny, some of its small-business clients are keen to share plans in the boardroom, or over a pint of beer. "There's a clear benefit to being in a room with someone—being able to read their body language a little better."

At the Big Four, body language isn't always as crucial as it might be at smaller firms: corporate working relationships are often more task-oriented and, given the multinational nature of client operations, often dispersed around the globe. Sonya Fraser, EY's Canadian audit leader, manages the company's audit practice, as well as the EY office in her hometown of Halifax. "We haven't had to adapt in ways that other industries have," says Fraser. "We already had a lot of the communications with clients through our digital audit platforms," like the audit platform EY Canvas, the analytics platform EY Helix and EY Atlas, a repository for thought leadership.

One big change that took place during the pandemic, however, was a full-scale adoption of virtual audit rooms. According to Fraser, they're basically Microsoft Teams with groups of auditors who can interact in real-time. In some cases, team members work together in an EY office—where protocols and social distancing allow—while in other cases, they dial in from their home offices.

Early in the pandemic, many firms also had to adapt how they were doing inventory counts for clients, especially when in-person visits to a client site were not allowed. In such cases, they relied on streamed video supplied by the client, usually via FaceTime or Zoom. Some companies are even using drones to count inventory during audits. (*Pivot* published a story on this phenomenon in September 2019.) Fraser, for one, thinks this is one development that will pick up steam: "The ability to use drones and other technologies will continue. Our digital audit platforms will continue to expand—and the digital audit is, without a doubt, where the future is headed."

“Adopting this technology was a three-year plan fast-forwarded to three weeks,” says True North’s Matt Peterson

The biggest adjustment for many CPAs over the past year wasn’t the mechanics of remote work, but the client connections. Dulny says that PwC’s increasing use of collaboration technology has made it easier to manage timelines and keep open communication throughout each engagement—and as the firm looks to the future, it’s already surveying clients on how they want to work going forward: “We’ve seen a significant jump, from 16 per cent to 50 per cent, in the number of people more comfortable working together in a predominantly remote way.” He sees the return of face-to-face client interactions—though fewer of them. “I just don’t think people will default to, ‘Hey, I’ve got to go there all the time.’ There will be a balance. Mindsets have opened up.”

A FULL HALF

of PwC Canada’s clients say they’re comfortable working together remotely most of the time, up from 16 per cent

Peterson of True North has certainly seen minds open among his conservative clientele. In the beginning, he says, some people were resistant to adopting True North’s new technologies—including workflow program Karbon, proposal management software Practice Ignition, and HelloSign, an e-signature program—especially in Okotoks, the rural town where the firm’s second office is located. “Okotoks is a cowboy town,” says Peterson. “You can still ride a horse to work if you want. And there’s often a distrust of the government, of banks and lawyers.” If it can’t be done in person, it isn’t done.

To help overcome resistance, Peterson and Gabinet started offering webinars for clients on topics such as how to go paperless or electronically sign documents. They also pushed the videos on their social media platforms and in monthly newsletters. The webinars have proven so popular that Peterson plans to make them a permanent feature. “Clients have been great, now that they’ve been through it once. In all facets of their life, they’ve had to adopt new tools and new ways of doing things. So, it fast-forwarded this adoption, just by necessity. And it’s really helped our business to become more efficient.”

For True North, operating in Alberta, with COVID-19 pain layered on top of oil-and-gas industry misery, it’s been a turbulent period. Peterson says they lost 16 per cent of their clients last year—including some who died from COVID-19 and others whose businesses simply went under. “There’s been a lot of people who just haven’t been able to pay their bills. And we’ve had to eat a lot of bills to keep some of our clients.” Still, he says, business was up 45 per cent overall for the year. All of the growth is coming from people leaving their jobs and starting new businesses. “We’re helping them get set up and guiding them along the way.”

Peterson is also planning a tentative date, later in 2021, for that grand opening—although he fully expects several employees will continue to work from home. He is revising plans for how the office might be used in the new normal. “Once COVID is done, we could have small-business boot camps, events, workshops, even provide meeting space for other businesses in the community.” Through the heavy clouds of a very dark year, a ray of light. ◆

Three ways accountants can leverage cloud-based software

Are you taking full advantage of everything online accounting has to offer? Whether you're new to the cloud accounting space or a veteran, here are three ways to leverage cloud-based solutions to support your practice.

Streamlining workflow

Onboarding new customers is a process that you want to make easy for you and for your clients. Their experience during this process can set the tone for the relationship moving forward and can make the difference in gaining their trust. By utilizing cloud technology, you can electronicaly review and sign a proposal and set up your software to automatically create a new client profile. This means that welcoming a new client and servicing them can happen almost simultaneously.

The ability to house all of your documents online means that you aren't bound to any particular location or time. As long as you have an internet connection and a device to access it, you can work anywhere.

Forecast and grow your practice

Forecasting doesn't have to be an arbitrary task that keeps you stuck behind a desk for hours. With Xero, you can customize forecasts with existing budgets or spreadsheets to sync with your accounting software.

This will also allow you to provide your clients with user-friendly projections on the trajectory of their business. With an accurate idea of cash flow, your clients can grow their business and prepare for any variable in the near to distant future.

Maximize profitability

The cloud knows no boundaries. The digitisation of the accounting space offers an exciting opportunity to shift the walls of your market beyond the constraints of where you're located. If your software is online, access to your clients and their data need not be a world away, even when they physically are. If you love working with coffee shops in Toronto, there's no reason why you can't service coffee shops across Canada. Today, communication technology is the teleportation device old sci-fi movies imagined us having in the 21st century.

Whether your clients come from near or far, you can automate tasks, provide them with time-saving technology, and liberate your own time as well...

To find out how Xero can help you grow your accounting practice, visit our website.

By Faye Pang

Country manager, Canada

Faye Pang is the Canada Country Manager for Xero, the global small business platform with more than 2.7 million subscribers worldwide that's dedicated to making business beautiful. Prior to joining Xero, Faye helped launch the Uber Eats app in Toronto in December 2015, scaling the business from 80 restaurants on launch day to 20,000 partners by the end of her tenure.

THE BREAKING POINT

The pandemic has put hundreds of thousands of Canadian women out of work. Many others are barely hanging on. And companies everywhere are trying to figure out how to bring them back from the brink.

by Lauren McKeon

When the pandemic started, Helina Patience thought she was ready. She runs Entreflow, a licensed public practice CPA accounting firm in Vancouver, and it's been 100 per cent cloud-based since it opened in 2012. The systems, processes and software were already in place for her accountants to work from home. Plus, she figured, it would only be two or three weeks of lockdown. She gathered all the monitors into her Nissan Pathfinder, bought a bunch of wine and drove around town, dropping off a bottle and a computer screen to each of her employees. "Keep working," she told them. "Be happy."

But after four weeks, things started to get heavy for everybody. She especially worried about the moms on her team. As the mother of two boys, ages four and six, Patience knew firsthand that being a working mom in finance could be gruelling: the punishing hours, the crushing stress, topped off with the guilt of not being able to do it all. The pandemic had taken that anxiety to stratospheric heights. Once it became clear businesses were in the revenue crunch for the long haul, distressed clients were calling Entreflow non-stop. Every new announcement from the Prime Minister's pandemic podium triggered a cascade of questions: Do I still need to lay off staff? How do I access the new funding? Is it enough money? Patience heard from clients who were mothers, confessing they didn't think they could take care of their family and their business.

During this time, Patience's husband was working full-time as her business partner (he has since stepped down and now works full-time for an Entreflow client). Even so, like many women, her own plate was overflowing. In addition to running Entreflow, taking care of her employees and taking care of her kids, she also works as a CFO for another company, Legible, which was preparing to go public. Her days started early and ended late, strung together by seemingly endless video calls from the desk in her bedroom.

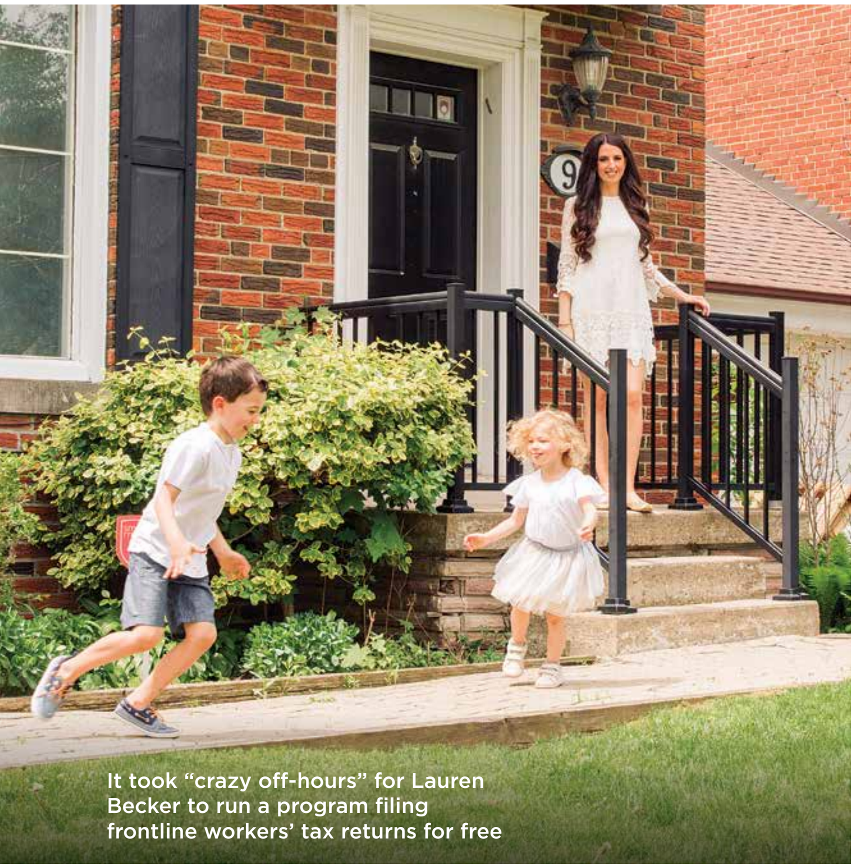
Patience spent a lot of time thinking about how she could make the situation better for herself and her employees. She launched virtual happy hours, increased her one-on-one check-ins and made it clear that work hours could be flexible—whatever people needed. She sent plants for their home-office desks. She bought out the remainder of Amazon's spatulas, mailing them to her team along with new cookbooks. As the year wore on, she arranged a socially distant picnic in the summer and a pumpkin carving in the fall. But all the socializing and cheerleading couldn't alleviate the stress. Half of her staff at the time were women, and soon they started dropping off. First one woman on her team asked for a leave of absence, then another quit. Then another. The men started to leave, too. "It's never enough," Patience says. "No matter how hard you try, it's not enough."

Over the last year, we've reimagined every aspect of how we work: we've purged office space and launched wellness programs and adopted futuristic new tech. The change has bloomed compassion and erased the lines between life and business. But, perhaps most of all, it has exposed just how historically unfriendly typical workplace structures and systems are to women. We now know that to thrive, firms must radically alter their approach to workforce equality. They must try to figure out what "enough" looks like.

In 1997, Pamela Jeffery founded the Women's Executive Network, an organization designed to mentor and support women's professional growth. She believed she understood the needs, wants and desires of women—and the things that blocked their way in the workplace. As COVID-19 overtook the country, she realized it was going to damage women brutally and irrevocably. Jeffery knew in her bones that, if the pandemic stretched on, women would begin to put up their hands and say, "I can't do this anymore." They'd need to quit their jobs or cut their hours to look after their kids or ailing parents, and that's if they still had jobs to quit. She worried about gender-based violence, women's mental health, their ability to meet demands at work. "Unfortunately," she says, "what we feared would happen with women happened."

In the first two months of the pandemic, 1.5 million women in Canada lost their jobs. Canadian women between 25 and 54 lost jobs at twice the rate of men in the same age range. A year in, the losses look just as grim. In March 2021, RBC released a report showing that almost half a million women who lost their jobs due to the pandemic hadn't returned to work. More than 200,000 of them had sunk into long-term unemployment—a threefold increase from the previous year. In the hardest-hit industries, accommodation and food services, women accounted for 65 per cent of the job losses. Many women who left the workforce weren't told to leave; they felt they had to. One Canadian study found that working mothers were far more stressed, anxious and depressed than working women who didn't have kids or working spouses.

"All the weeks were the same," says CPA Lauren Becker. "It wasn't just one particular day or week of this—it was months on end."



It took "crazy off-hours" for Lauren Becker to run a program filing frontline workers' tax returns for free

PHOTOGRAPH BY CLAUDINE BALTAZAAR

The losses have been great enough to coin a name for the phenomenon: she-cession. In the last year, 12 times as many mothers as fathers left their jobs to care for toddlers or school-aged children, according to the RBC report. One May 2020 study by the U.K.-based Institute for Fiscal Studies found that mothers looked after their children for an average of 10.3 hours every day during the first months of the pandemic—about 2.3 hours more than fathers—and did two hours more housework every day. In the U.S., one couple charted the number of interruptions from their two daughters, ages 8 and 12, on a random Thursday morning during lockdown. They discovered, "the average length of an uninterrupted stretch of work time was three minutes, 24 seconds. The longest uninterrupted period was 19 minutes, 35 seconds. The shortest was mere seconds."

Even the most egalitarian households have trouble finding balance. Asma Hasan is a CPA and senior manager with KPMG's taxation services department in Toronto. She leads a team of 15 people, two-thirds of whom are women. She is also the mother of a six-year-old girl who is on the autism spectrum. When lockdown started in March 2020, she received a call from her daughter's behavioural therapist telling her the office was closed. She remembers thinking, *How is this even possible?* Her daughter's routine was highly structured and had been since she was two: therapy in the morning, school in the afternoon, home in the evening. Hasan was at a loss. How were she and her husband, both working professionals, going to cope? The first step was for Hasan to tell her colleagues she needed help. She needed flexibility in the day; she needed them to know she wouldn't always be at her desk and certainly not always from 9 to 5. She was relieved when they agreed.

Next, she and her husband mapped the first week. Every hour was blocked out: when each of them had a meeting, when they needed child-free hours to meet an urgent deadline, when they'd step away from their makeshift desks to take their daughter for a walk or do an activity. After the first month, things got easier. Hasan also accessed KPMG's Working Parents Network, a dedicated portal that provides access to tutors, companies that provide meal prep and—the most helpful for Hasan—the ability to connect with other working moms to share tips and strategies. "Within a few weeks, we got into this routine of knowing what to expect. We knew what to do," she says. "But that first month was a challenge. I won't deny that."

At Crowe Soberman in Toronto, Lauren Becker was also adjusting to the new world order. Becker

is a CPA, the company's director of professional development and the mother of two young kids. At the beginning of the pandemic, her daughter was two and her son was four. Most days, they stayed with her and her husband, all four of them huddled around the family's dining table. She'd try to work and help her son with his schoolwork, while her daughter climbed all over her. She set her phone alarm so she'd remember to set up her son's Zoom school in all the chaos. It became normal for Becker's daughter to sit on her lap during video calls. Often, her son hollered in the background or her daughter wouldn't nap or Becker would sneak into another room only to have a family member burst in during an important call. Add to that: making lunches and snacks, helping with homework, answering every question her kids might have. Work nights stretched into the dark hours for several weeks when she volunteered to run her firm's "Accounting for Bravery" program, in which a team of CPAs filed frontline workers' tax returns for free. She only got her work done because she clocked what she calls "crazy off-hours."

"All the weeks were the same," Becker says. "It wasn't just one particular day or week of this—it was months on end." She was essentially working two jobs: CPA and mom. She often saw other mothers online late at night, and it felt nice to commiserate over the same challenges. Together, they also talked strategies for how to carve out time during the day and how to support each other. Becker says her COO was particularly encouraging: reminding everyone to log off, stop checking their emails and take vacation days. The firm emphasized mental health. They did yoga breaks, implemented a meditation program, closed the offices on Fridays even though people had nowhere to go. And, in January 2021, the firm officially implemented flex hours. Each individual is free to choose their own working hours, so long as they communicate with their team.

Asma Hasan, a CPA and senior manager with KPMG's taxation services department in Toronto, struggled to juggle work and parenting her six-year-old daughter during the pandemic

PHOTOGRAPH BY COURTESY OF ASMA HASAN

Helina Patience, a CPA who runs a Vancouver accounting firm, tried to keep employees happy, but three months into the pandemic she could tell they were already burning out

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNILEE MARIGOMEN

For many women, at Crowe Soberman and elsewhere, this is one of the most positive changes to come out of the pandemic: the complete demolition of the one-size-fits-all workday. Research into parental leave supports the idea that the best road to equality in the workforce isn't to give women special treatment, but rather to normalize time off and adaptability for everyone. Making the flex policy official at the firm, says Becker, relieved any anxiety mothers—even those who were junior staff—may have felt about leaving their desk to pick up kids or even taking a timeout for themselves. Nobody felt like they were singling themselves out.

Across the board, the pandemic has morphed the business world's attitudes toward remote and flex work. One September 2020 study found that 45 per cent of working Canadians surveyed would prefer to work remotely at least three days a week. More than a quarter said they'd like to work flex hours. And more than half said their employers have embraced remote and flexible work throughout the pandemic.

Pamela Jeffery, meanwhile, is determined to help companies assist their female employees. In April 2020, Jeffery and several of her highest-powered friends launched the Prosperity Project, a non-profit designed to mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic on women. Each of the Big Four accounting firms (along with Crowe Soberman) have signed on with the Prosperity Project, donating money and embracing its cause. Pamela Achenbach, a partner at EY's audit practice, says her firm recognized from the beginning that COVID-19 affected everyone differently and that the pandemic forced them to keep re-examining their flex policies. That meant frequently checking in with employees and allowing them to keep adapting their workdays. Like the other Big Four firms, the company also instituted more flexible work policies, no matter an employee's jurisdiction.

According to Jeffery, flexible work hours and remote office models are just the start. Working mothers also need affordable and accessible childcare—and that's something firms can do themselves, whether it's starting their own day care centres or offering rebates. In April, the federal government's budget announcement on affordable childcare came as a relief to many working mothers, but it isn't a panacea. The system will take time to roll out and firms have the opportunity to fill the gaps faster and, even once it's in place, to offer extra support.

At the Prosperity Project, Jeffery is also working to pair women with role models and mentors. The initiative is called the Rosie Mentoring Program, after Rosie the Riveter, the iconic ad campaign targeting female workers in World War II. The pandemic may have shut the door on many jobs in the low-paying hospitality sector, but Jeffery hopes it will open other doors in its place, inspiring women to train for new, higher-paying STEM jobs.

By the end of May 2020, Helina Patience could tell her team was burning out. Some of her staffers told her they couldn't go on. Patience was feeling it, too. Her days started at 7:30 a.m. and ended, well, when they ended. Most days were back-to-back meetings with clients and team members. On one particularly tough afternoon negotiating parenting and intense client calls, she poured herself a small glass of brandy, taking a long sip between one duty and the next. Then, on the call with her client, another mother, she was tired and forgot the glass was clearly visible as she absently reached for it—apologizing and explaining profusely once she realized. Her client only laughed and reached for a glass of wine she'd been nursing off-screen.

Finally, at the beginning of summer 2020, she'd had enough—so she closed Entreflow for a week. No calls from clients, no deadlines, no workshops, no meetings. She managed to clear her schedule, only attending one webinar for work. It was her first, blissful pause in months. But something unexpected happened when she and her staff returned. "We came back and the post-vacation depression set in," she says. "And everyone was like, 'Oh God. Now I remember how bad it was.' "

The break became a turning point for a complete overhaul of the firm. All across the country, women were exiting the workforce, asking for leaves of absence or outright quitting. By this point, half of Patience's staff were women, but she might have wondered what her virtual office would look like in a year. She told her staff there was a position

The best road to equality in the workforce isn't to give women special treatment, but rather to normalize time off and adaptability for everyone

waiting for them should they ever want, or be able, to come back. And it wasn't only mothers. One team member moved home to Ireland (she kept her job and works remotely). Another had family issues and moved back in with her parents for a month (ditto). Those who stayed helped generate a conversation about everything Entreflow needed to change—things nobody had really noticed but were now, in the pressure cooker of the pandemic, clear and urgent. Patience revamped her entire team structure, everyone's job descriptions, all the company's systems, everything. It wasn't easy, but she feels it's made for a stronger, more profitable company. Now, nearly two-thirds of her staff are women, up from half at the beginning of the pandemic.

Patience is now comfortable blurring the lines between personal and business. It's no longer awkward or unprofessional if her kid pops up on a work call or if she dips out to fix their snack or meet them at the bus. Patience has noticed that fewer and fewer women feel like they have to wear makeup to work. In many firms, the pressure to perform is off: no more trying to pretend that they don't have feelings, that their laundry is always done, that their dog doesn't bark and that their kids are invisible angels. More women, maybe for the first time, feel like they can be themselves. There are fewer excuses.

The last year has been an epic challenge, but it's also been a catalyst for change. It took the pandemic for people to respect the family within the context of the workplace. ◆

EXTRAORDINARY ITEM

WATERWORKS

A Quebec company is eager to prove that electric power isn't just for cars **BY MATHIEU DE LAJARTRE**

Orca, one of the world's first electric personal watercraft, is set to make waves. Behind Orca is Taiga Motors, a Quebec company founded in 2015 by three mechanical and electrical engineering students at McGill University.

The first machines hit the water this summer, promising a whisper-quiet ride despite being able to reach speeds of over 100 km/h. The powertrain technology was developed and adapted from Taiga's line of electric snowmobiles, which are themselves expected to launch toward the end of the year. "The key technology is a fully integrated powertrain and battery management system that allows for optimal performance," explains Mark Orsmond, CPA and Taiga's CFO. "It features a battery pack that can be used in extreme temperatures and under extreme pressure."

The charge time is generally two to three hours, but fluctuates depending on the type of charging station used, while Orca's battery range is about 50 to 60 km, or roughly two hours of use.

Despite the hefty price tag—US$15,000 and up—there is already enthusiasm for Orca, with more than

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF **TAIGA MOTORS**

1,600 pre-orders placed by early spring. “Many buyers are electric vehicle enthusiasts who have never owned a recreational vehicle before,” says Orsmond, who adds that the company has received nearly 800 applications from dealers who want to carry the product.

Taiga Motors is growing quickly after having devoted several years to R&D, which it hopes will give it an edge over its competition. Bombardier Recreational Products, for example, announced in March that it intends to invest nearly $300 million in the electrification of its recreational vehicles by 2026. Meanwhile, the global powersports market exceeded US$34 billion in 2020 and is expected to grow by six per cent between 2021 and 2027.

THE GLOBAL POWERSPORTS MARKET EXCEEDED $34 BILLION IN 2020 AND IS EXPECTED TO GROW SIX PER CENT EACH YEAR

In order to maintain its lead, Taiga plans to break ground on an assembly facility in Shawinigan, Que., this year that will have a production capacity of 80,000 units per year by 2025.

In April, with the backing of financial institutions like Desjardins, which believed in its potential enough to offer a $10-million line of credit, Taiga Motors went public and raised roughly $150 million—without even having delivered its first machine. When Orsmond spoke to *Pivot* for this story, the transaction was being finalized as a relieved (and admittedly a little nervous) Orsmond was waiting for a $139-million bank transfer. As he put it: “The company is in a very robust financial situation for the foreseeable future.” It looks like calm waters ahead. ◆

TRENDING

BORROWED TIMES

The massive popularity of lending sites like Ruckify signals the rental revolution is officially underway **BY COURTNEY SHEA**

ILLUSTRATION BY **DAN PARSONS**

The Ottawa-based rental platform Ruckify was just about to launch in Austin, Texas, when COVID-19 sent its plans into chaos. And, if this was true for most businesses in the face of a deadly viral outbreak, it felt particularly true for a company that makes its money lending out other people’s stuff.

“Initially there was definitely a thought of, *Oh no—who wants to share during a pandemic?*” says Ruckify CFO Dean Cosman. But, as time passed, hardships began to present themselves as opportunities. “With gyms shuttered and so many people wanting to exercise, we approached fitness pros about signing up,” says Cosman. Used treadmills and dumbbells became hot items, along with recreational vehicles and water sports equipment.

Initial pandemic panic notwithstanding, 2020 was a big year for the now four-year-old company, founded in 2017 as a joint venture between Steve Cody (Marketplace Studio) and Bruce Linton (Canopy Growth), who both own homes in the same Ottawa neighbourhood. One day following a storm, Linton found himself in need of a large chainsaw to help cut up a tree that had landed in front of Cody’s house. He pondered with Cody over why it wasn’t easier to find someone in the area with the appropriate power tool to lend and, because both men are serial entrepreneurs, the unmet need quickly became a new business venture.

The concept is simple: "Airbnb for things," as Linton has described it. Owners post items, renters pay to borrow and Ruckify takes a commission, usually 10 per cent, for facilitating the transaction. The company is now operational in 200 markets across North America with a focus on key growth areas in Ottawa, Calgary, Nashville, Tenn., and Austin. With nearly $20 million in funding, all signs point to a public offering on the TSX Venture Exchange in 2021—further evidence that the rental revolution is upon us.

This shift in consumer attitudes was already well-established. We share our living spaces (Airbnb), our cars (Uber), our clothing (Rent the Runway) and now our gadgets and power tools. According to a recent report from Statista, the global sharing economy is predicted to hit US$335 billion by 2025, up from US$15 billion in 2014.

The rise of the rental market dovetails with other key consumer trends, particularly when you look at millennial and Gen Z consumers. "This is a cohort that is very interested in sustainability, which is a clear advantage of rental," says FCPA Daniel Baer, Canadian assurance consumer products and retail leader at EY, who specializes in retail markets.

Real estate is another motivator. "When you look at the size of property that people are living in these days, especially in urban centres—not a lot of young professionals have garage space," Baer explains. Short-term rentals, especially of bulky items like kayaks and power tools, just make sense.

And, of course, the so-called Instagram effect has also played a key role, as many younger consumers value experiences over possessions. "That means maybe you want to rent a particular car for the drive from Toronto to Montreal, but you're not wanting to have it forever," Baer says. The desire for instant gratification is well-served when you can pay less to have it now. Baer notes the rise of the art rental market: "Maybe, rather than spending on something that you'll love forever, you want to switch it up every few months."

Does this mean the end of ownership? In the luxury and high-end markets, it's unlikely, says Baer. Compared to low- and medium-income earners, that demographic has seen minimal slump, if any, in their post-pandemic purchasing power. And, while most rental companies, including Ruckify, have introduced protocols around health and safety, subsectors like clothing rental may have trouble regaining consumer confidence.

At the same time, economic insecurity has meant a lot more people are interested in monetizing the assets they have. "The top quartile of our owners-renters brings in an average of $1,950 per quarter, which is pretty significant when you're dealing with economic stresses," says Cosman. It makes sense: the rental market emerged during the Great Depression and both Uber and Airbnb launched during the last economic downturn. The COVID-19 crisis has given us all sorts of reasons to rebuild a better world where sharing our things, if not our germs, is the new normal. ◆

BOOK VALUE

RIDING HIGH

Corporate greed mixes with national pride in the dramatic disgrace of an ex-Nissan CEO **BY BRIAN BETHUNE**

The high-water marks in the ebb and flow of a tide of anti-globalization are, at least so far, generally reckoned to be Brexit and the election of Donald Trump. But in *Collision Course*, their magisterial account of the rise and fall—and escape—of famed executive Carlos Ghosn, business journalists Hans Greimel and William Sposato make a powerful case for a third key moment. Although Ghosn is best known for how he dodged his collision with Japan's justice system—smuggled out of the country in a large trunk—he was once famous for far more. Ghosn was a rock-star CEO, simultaneously head of two national icons, French automaker Renault and its Japanese counterpart Nissan, and a symbolic giant in what was seen as an ascendant international economy.

Born in Brazil in 1954, raised in Lebanon and educated in France, Ghosn was fluent in Portuguese, Arabic, English and French when he left an 18-year career with tire manufacturer Michelin in 1996 to join Renault as its second in command. In 1999, on the heels of Renault's US$5.4-billion investment in Nissan, Ghosn—known as "Le Cost Cutter"—was dispatched to Tokyo. There, as Nissan COO, he oversaw a rapid and ruthlessly executed return to profitability, becoming CEO in 2001.

Nissan was $19 billion in debt when Ghosn arrived, with only four of its 43 models turning a profit. By 2004, Nissan's annual profit margin had grown to 11 per cent. Vehicle sales surged from 2.6 million to nearly 3.4 million by early 2005. The next year, Ghosn was CEO of Renault as well, becoming the first person to run two *Fortune* Global 500 companies at the same time. Accolades poured in, as Ghosn was lionized for managing a mutually beneficial blend of two very different corporate—and national—cultures, shaping an "alliance" that grew, with the admission of Mitsubishi and other carmakers, into the world's largest auto group by 2016. In Japan, admiration amounted to reverence: the CEO was the first foreigner ever to receive a prestigious Blue Ribbon Medal from the Emperor himself and the hero of a popular manga, *The True Story of Carlos Ghosn*.

The surface dazzle lasted almost two decades, and when the fissures underneath—far more papered-over than sealed, Greimel and Sposato argue—split open, the fall of Carlos Ghosn was as shocking as it was spectacular. He was taken into custody as soon as he landed in Tokyo on Nov. 19, 2018, unaware that senior Nissan executives had been co-operating with prosecutors for six months in a probe of his under-wraps compensation package. As Ghosn languished in jail, without bail, communication with his family or the presence of his defence lawyers, but with hours of frequent interrogation, the charges against him grew to include spending Nissan money for his private benefit.

WHEN THE FISSURES SPLIT OPEN, THE FALL OF CARLOS GHOSN WAS AS SHOCKING AS IT WAS SPECTACULAR

The clash of values between Japanese and Western judicial norms, put under a spotlight by Ghosn's celebrity status, makes up perhaps the most compelling chapter in *Collision Course*, but it's only one of the collisions Greimel and Sposato explore. Even in his glory days, Ghosn trod on national sensitivities in Japan. At his first Nissan shareholders meeting in 2000, he was upbraided for failing to bow before his speech—"You've got to teach him some manners," an attendee yelled at a senior Japanese executive. His cost cutting shredded traditional business arrangements. Even the matter of Ghosn's hidden compensation was rooted in cultural differences. The kind of pay differentials with ordinary workers that American CEOs can flaunt verge on taboo in Japan, and Nissan executives—fearing a better offer might lure Ghosn to the U.S.—co-operated in obscuring his real income.

But no collision was more powerful than that between globalization and resurgent nationalism. When Renault poured $5 billion into Nissan in 1999, the new alliance's structure reflected the balance of economic power. Renault owned 43 per cent of Nissan, with full voting rights, while Nissan held only 15 per cent of the French firm, with no voting rights. That inspired some resentment among senior Nissan executives, according to Greimel and Sposato's reporting. That resentment only increased after Ghosn's stewardship reversed the relative economic positions of Nissan and Renault—leaving the former more profitable than the latter, but still the junior partner.

The Japanese government too exhibited wariness toward the alliance, because the French government had a 15 per cent stake in Renault—and double voting rights—placing a foreign state deep within a Japanese corporate crown jewel. That tension was ripe to break into the open, *Collision Course* argues, after Ghosn signed a contract renewal with Renault shortly before his arrest, predicated on him turning the alliance into an "irreversible" partnership and cementing the status quo.

Greimel and Sposato, in their even-handed approach, steer between the competing narratives about Carlos Ghosn as either criminal egomaniac or victim of a corporate-state conspiracy. Instead, they incline to a third view: "It is possible that Ghosn was both a fraudster and a fall guy." Nissan executives, happy to ignore his questionable actions while he was rescuing their company, knew just how to bring him down when they judged him both unneeded and potentially hostile. That leads the authors to their one certain conclusion: the risks of doing international business are high indeed in a world that remains, at its heart, intensely nationalistic. ◆

DIVERSIONS

WILD CARDS

How the pandemic breathed life into the billion-dollar world of sports-card collecting

BY STEPHEN SMITH

If you were a 10-year-old in 1979 and somehow managed to lay hands on an O-Pee-Chee Wayne Gretzky rookie card, you would have been wise to stash it away somewhere for a decade or four.

Sure, it's a good-looking piece of cardboard, showing Gretzky in Oilers blue-and-orange, aslant on his skates, gazing up at the scoreboard. But, for all the youthful pleasure you'd have derived from freely handling it, just knowing that in 41 years time a well-preserved Gretzky of this same vintage would find a buyer at auction willing to pay US$1.2 million (a record price for a hockey card) might have been enough to stop you from playing around with it.

No one really predicted the boom that has taken hold of the North American market for sports cards and collectibles. Say what you want about sourdough and sea shanties, the buzz around cardboard-backed images of pitchers, quarterbacks and shooting guards has been a truly surprising hallmark of the pandemic.

Marc Juteau has watched it all explode firsthand. As founder and president of Classic Auctions, Canada's premier purveyor of sports memorabilia, he's been seeing interest in sports cards intensify in real time over the course of an otherwise fraught year. "People say that it used to be a hobby," he says. "Now it's an industry."

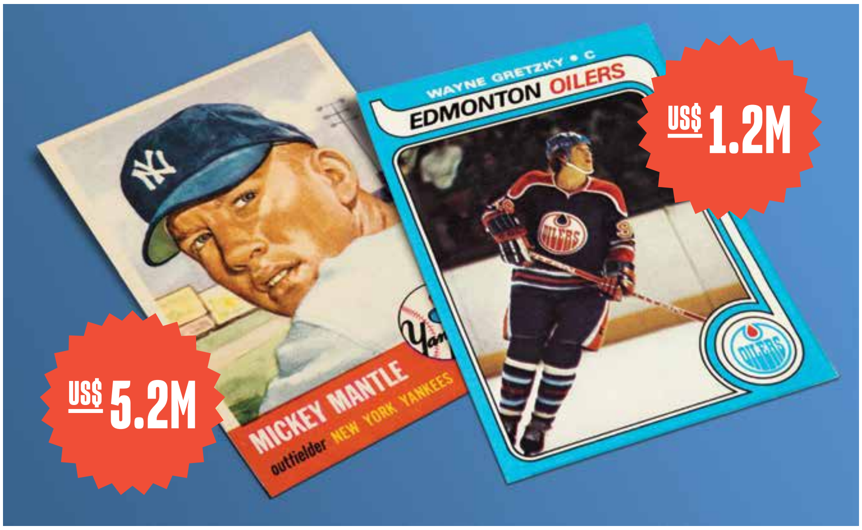
Prior to March of last year, the highest price accruing to a sports card was the US$3.3 million paid in 2016 for a medium-grade baseball card from 1909 depicting Pittsburgh Pirates shortstop Honus Wagner. Over the past year, that sale price has been topped four times, including a record US$5.2-million deal in January involving a 1952 Mickey Mantle card. Three months later, a 2003 LeBron James rookie card became the most expensive basketball card ever sold, matching the $5.2 million Mantle figure. As of April, the Wagner sale is the oldest transaction among the top ten. The rest all happened in the past 15 months.

The last time the market for cardboard keepsakes was so dynamic was in the early 1990s, though the money on the move then was nothing compared to today. The landscape has shifted in other ways, too. Grading—the strict independent determination of their physical condition—is paramount now to the value of a card. That million-dollar Gretzky rookie card was deemed a perfect 10—"gem mint" in the parlance of the assessor, Professional Sports Authenticator, and thereby super rare. (In a 2021 sale, Classic Auctions sold the same card, graded a six—meaning it shows some wear—for $7,872.)

Attaching a valuation to the sports card market as a whole isn't easy. Pre-pandemic, one estimate pegged the money flowing in and around sports memorabilia (cards included) on eBay and at independent auction houses and retailers at around US$5.4 billion annually. Now? Anyone bold enough to venture a guess at the growth the last year has seen might say that number has doubled, or even tripled.

Yet when the pandemic hit, the collectible sector looked to be heading for an abrupt halt. "I felt that the industry was going to be in big trouble," says Chris Carlin, head of customer experience for the industry-leading manufacturer Upper Deck, headquartered in Carlsbad, Calif. "Usually, the collectibles market goes very similarly as the economy. But we realized pretty quickly that this wasn't slowing down," he says. "This was going to get bigger and crazier."

Suddenly, more people were grounded at home, looking out at the world through a laptop—and with more disposable income. "There was a snowball effect," says Juteau. "Once people see that the prices are rising, more people want to invest."



Some, like Sportsnet television host Ken Reid, say the brief void in sports being played at the onset of the pandemic helped breathe new life into the collectibles market. "If you still wanted to have sports in your life, you almost had to manufacture that—and collecting was an easy way to do it."

Reid, who has authored two books on hockey cards, describes his stockpile of vintage Gretzkys, Orrs and Espositos as a relatively modest one: a mere 60,000 cards or so. "I'm a collector at heart," he says, tapping into what is still, for many, the key attraction of cards: the stories and history they harbour, and the emotional strands that link collectors to childhood memories and their own sports heroes.

Views differ on how long the present boom might be expected to last, or whether it is simply a bubble, fixing to burst at any moment.

"High-quality, high-end stuff will always have a strong market," says Chris Thompson, a wealth manager based in London, Ont., who views cards through an investment lens and offers services on how to craft a sports-card portfolio, based on his readings of the market. "My view is that the market softens between now and late fall, as we transition as a society back to work. We're going to remove probably two or three of the factors that kind of pushed this market in the last year."

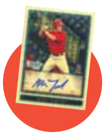
Thompson has been advising clients to monitor what he calls the "key cards"—household names like Gretzky, Michael Jordan and LeBron James. "They're the Apples, the Microsofts, the Amazons—the five or six stocks that drive the market." ◆

THE 5 MOST EXPENSIVE TRADING CARDS*

T-1. LEBRON JAMES
(Upper Deck, 2003)
$5.2 MILLION
Sold: April 2021

T-1. MICKEY MANTLE
(Topps, 1952)
$5.2 MILLION
Sold: January 2021

3. LUKA DONCIC
(Panini, 2018)
$4.6 MILLION
Sold: February 2021



4. MIKE TROUT
(Bowman, 2009)
$3.8 MILLION
Sold: August 2020

5. HONUS WAGNER
(T206, 1909)
$3.3 MILLION
Sold: October 2016

*AS OF MAY 2021, ALL FIGURES USD

DECOR

DYE ANOTHER DAY

A Niagara Falls, Ont., company is saving thousands of tonnes of house paint from the waste stream by making old cans of it new again **BY MATTHEW HAGUE**

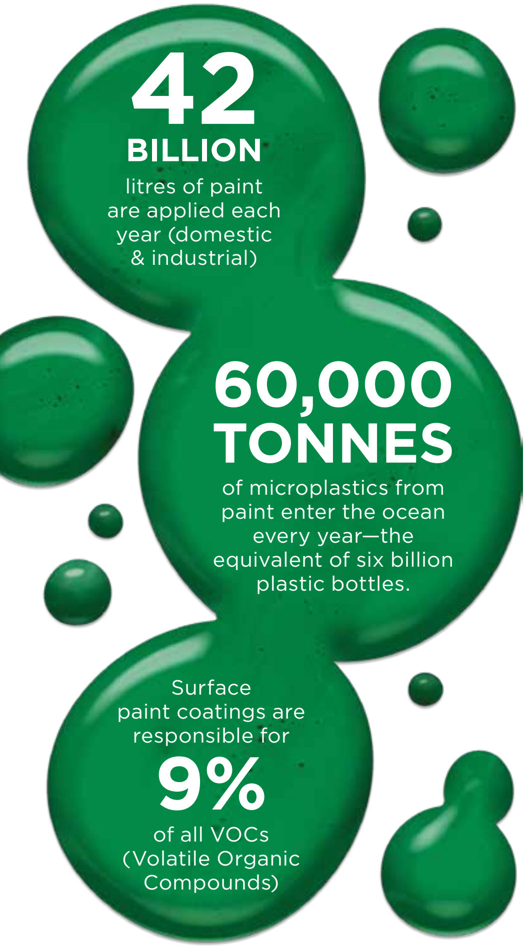
Twelve years ago, when CPA Allison Hawkins moved to Windsor, Ont., from Toronto, her to-do list included renovating both her home and the office of her accounting firm, Hawkins & Co. In short, she needed paint.

But cost wasn't the key deciding factor in which brand to buy. Instead, Hawkins sought out the sole specialty eco shop in Windsor where she could find something without noxious ingredients. "I wanted a healthy working and home environment," she says. "My husband and I had recently watched a friend die too young of cancer. We were hyper aware of the chemicals in everything we were buying."

More than a decade later, like many others who are taking time during the pandemic to update their interiors, Hawkins is at it again, remodelling a vintage bank building into her new office. (Sherwin-Williams, one of the world's largest paint-makers, saw record revenues in 2020, as people scrambled to up their Zoom backdrops.) Fortunately, in the interval, "green" paints have become much easier to find. "There is so much more choice these days," says Hawkins. All the major brands, like Behr and Benjamin Moore, available at big box or hardware stores offer hues with low or zero volatile organic compounds (VOCs)—common pollutants that may trigger asthma attacks and cause headaches and eye irritation.

Buzzy web-based startups like New York-based Backdrop and Clare deal exclusively in water-based, eco-certified options. Together, the two have attracted more than US$10 million in venture capital funding.

Meanwhile, Loop, a paint manufacturer based in Niagara Falls, Ont., is taking sustainability to a higher standard. Beyond being low in VOCs, the paint it produces is derived from cast-away paints and coatings that are recycled and re-pigmented into new products. "More and more businesses need to see waste, such as discarded



SOURCES: IUCN, COATINGS WORLD, EPA

paint, as a potential resource," says Josh Wiwcharyk, Loop's president. "It's essential if we want to move to a greener economy." Other Loop products repurpose roof tars, varnishes and other sealants.

The environmental need for such an approach is clear. Every year in Ontario alone, consumers jettison around 10,000 tonnes of paint, according to Loop—almost one kilogram per person. Return to Retail, a provincial recycling program that helps supply Loop, collects more than 1,300 tonnes a year. That's enough to decorate the walls in more than 35,000 homes—much better than languishing in the bottom of rusting tins or, worse, in Ontario's landfills, where it can seep into the ground.

Loop diverts about 5,000 tonnes of used material annually from the waste stream, employing a proprietary process to remanufacture and reuse it. Similar colours are mixed together to limit the volume of new pigment required to achieve a particular tone, though some new raw materials are necessary. Low-quality paints are sorted out and resold to discount distributors. "We know our paint is good quality because we only use good-quality paint to make it," says Wiwcharyk. "A lot of it comes from familiar brands like Benjamin Moore."

One key advantage: Loop upends the idea that more sustainable means more expensive. One gallon costs about $18, which is roughly half the price of similar brand-name paints. The accessible pricing is one reason Loop is the only paint available at Canada's 260 Giant Tiger stores, the company's exclusive distribution channel. "There are benefits to being a single-source vendor," says Wiwcharyk, noting the low need for client customization and therefore lower production costs.

Loop, however, has a kink. Whereas Sherwin-Williams offers at least 48 different types of white, Loop's total palette is currently 10 colours in total. The narrow selection is a necessary result of making new paints from existing hues, as opposed to starting with raw pigments. It's also not unprecedented. Startups Backdrop and Clare have an intentionally short list of colour choices (and only a handful of whites between them), with both companies claiming that focused curation reduces confusion among customers. After all, can anyone really tell the difference between eggshell and popcorn, cloud and cotton white? ◆

***PIVOT* RECOMMENDS**

Off the clock

BY CHRIS POWELL

Read

Bestselling author and speaker Greg McKeown argues that not everything has to be hard. In fact, that's the guiding ethos of his book ***Effortless: Make It Easier to Do What Matters Most***. It offers actionable advice for simplifying essential activities, allowing people to achieve the results they're seeking without burning out. If McKeown's recommendations were widely adopted, there might come a day where there's little distinction between working hard and hardly working.

▲

Watch

Amazon Prime's upcoming series, ***The Underground Railroad***, is based on Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-winning 2016 novel. The 10-part series, directed by Academy Award winner Barry Jenkins, imagines a world in which the Underground Railroad is a literal underground rail system that transports southern slaves to freedom. It stars newcomer Thuso Mbedu as a slave who escapes a Georgia plantation and Joel Edgerton as a bounty hunter committed to hunting her down.

Listen

Hosted by journalists Michael Hobbes and Sarah Marshall, each weekly episode of the podcast ***You're Wrong About*** tackles a specific historical event they say has been miscast in the public imagination. Topics run the gamut from Yoko Ono supposedly breaking up the Beatles, the Challenger disaster and Janet Jackson's infamous Super Bowl "wardrobe malfunction."

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF AMAZON

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MAKING THE CALLS

34-year-old Sarwar Qureshi grew up playing basketball. When his playing days came to an end, the Ottawa-based accountant became a certified referee in order to stay in touch with the sport he loved **BY DAVE ZARUM**

I grew up in the ’90s watching NBA basketball—**Michael Jordan’s heyday**—and loved it. I came from a lower-middle-class family, so basketball was an easier sport to get into than, say, hockey. We had a basketball net in front of our house and would just play and play and play.

I played on my school teams. My position was guard, usually point guard. I was on the smaller end of the height spectrum, but I was good at passing and dribbling, and tried to bring some basketball IQ to the team. I started some games, but I was a support player coming off the bench. **I understood my limitations** [laughs].

When I was in high school, we needed 40 volunteer hours to graduate. I thought, **“What do I enjoy doing?”** I asked my old coaches if I could help out with practices, and they said: “We always need referees for our scrimmages.” When the team started playing in tournaments, they were required to bring a referee with them to games, and I offered to do the job.

Refereeing was a way to stay involved and remain in touch with the game. I’ve met great people. One of the senior referees, now retired, was a mentor figure to me and also happened to be a CPA. We first connected because **we could talk both basketball and accounting** lingo.

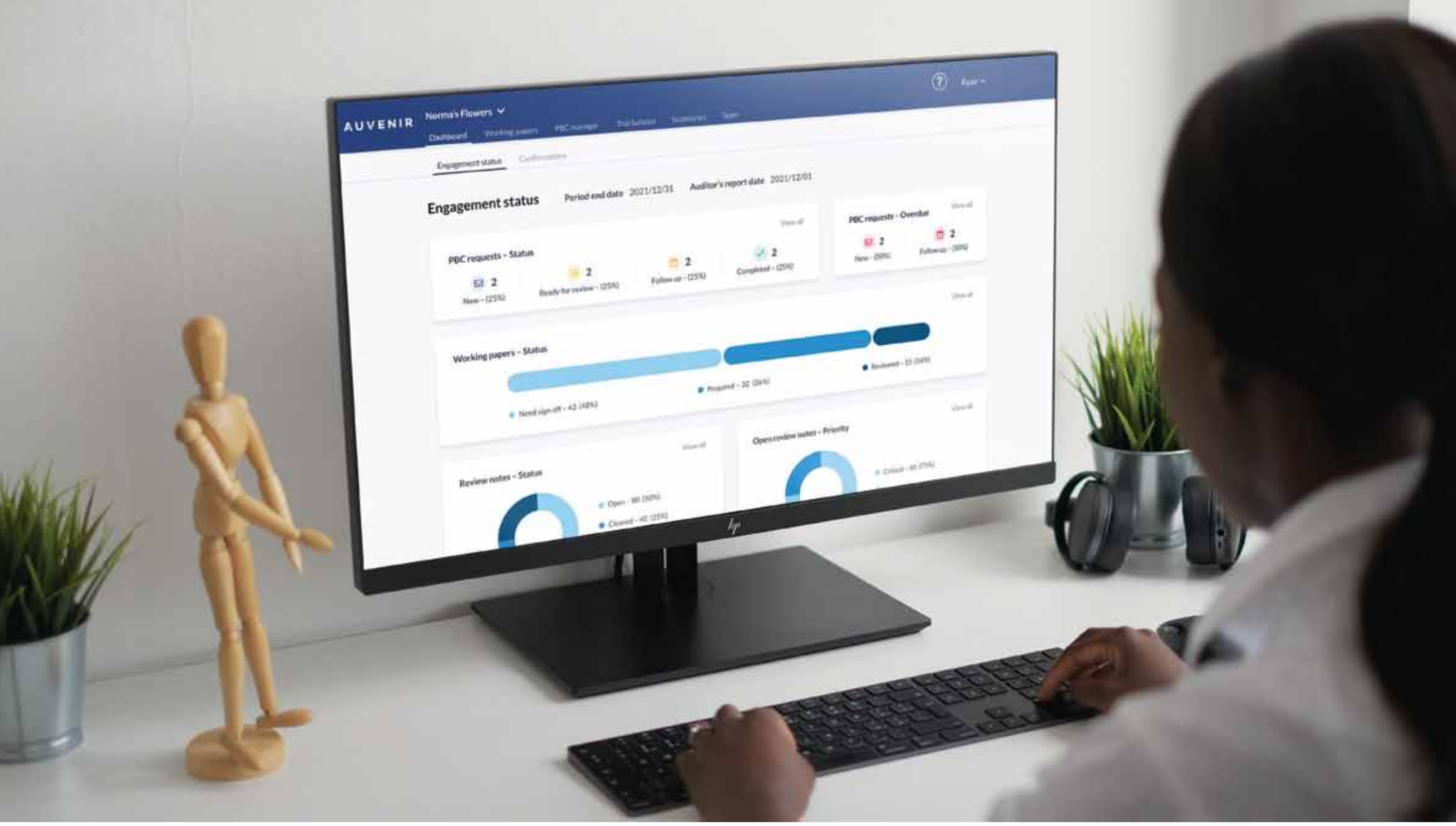
I love the sport, and you can get a good run in and get to know a lot of the people in the local basketball community. For me, it was a **double-win**: make some money and be involved in basketball.

As my interest grew, I learned that Ottawa has a referee certification program. From there you can get access to club basketball, as well as college and university level. I became certified in 2005 and **refereeing became a source of income** for me at university. A high school game back then would pay around forty bucks. Now that I’m a CPA, it may not seem like much, but at the time it did.

I’ve travelled to referee games in Edmonton, Vancouver, Toronto, Sudbury, Ont., and other places across Canada. The coolest trip I did was in 2012 for a high school tournament in Iqaluit, Nunavut. **The atmosphere was amazing.** It was a small gym packed with people—maybe 40 people—but they sounded like a crowd of 200.

With refereeing, you can do as much or as little as you like. There are competitive recreational leagues in Ottawa that take place at night, so I can still get those games in outside of **my core accounting work hours.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY **REMI THERIAULT**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