

Thrive

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THE EDWARDS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS MAGAZINE

MEET THE DEAN

Q & A WITH NEW
DEAN DAPHNE TARAS

FLAME ON

An ESB grad carries the torch for
the Vancouver 2010 Olympics

ESB GIVES BACK

ESB helps out in the community

EDWARDS MBA GOES ABROAD

Students share their stories

DEAN'S ADVISORY COUNCIL

We asked them all a single question.
Read their answers inside.



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SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

PLUS: A TOUR OF THE KW NASSER CENTRE; 5 PEOPLE, 5 JOBS; NEW FACES; WENDY WIGNES' RETIREMENT



Flame on

An Edwards B.Comm. grad proudly lights the way
for the Vancouver 2010 Olympics

The door opens and a man walks in with a white torch and a wide smile recognizable from the front page of a January edition of the Saskatoon Star Phoenix, which featured his story. The torch is still marked with soot from the Olympic flame, which he carried with pride for a small stretch during 106 days of cross-Canadian travel (at a speed of 7km per hour). The Olympic Torch Run kicked off the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games and he was fortunate enough to work for Coca-Cola and be a part of it.

John Early introduces himself and we sit down to talk about his experiences since graduating from the Edwards School of Business.

"You get this wonderful feeling knowing that you are the only one who will carry the Olympic flame for that period of time. There were 12,000 torch bearers that literally carried the torch across Canada and you are one of them... it was a very amazing feeling of pride and joy."

What year did you graduate from the B.Comm. program?
2008.

What are your favourite memories from university?

Getting involved, and being part of the Commerce Students' Society (CSS) executive – now the Edwards Business Students' Society (EBSS) – as well as being part of the social team for JDC West (Business Case Competition). I was the videographer for the CSS, and I got the word out to the student body about upcoming events. My experience really taught me the importance of getting involved.

What has your career path been since you graduated?

Ummm ... I really started to realize that whatever I did in life I wanted to make sure I was happy doing it. For the last few years the money wasn't always fantastic but has led to better and better things. I've been able to tour with different bands and help with financial management, ordering, event promoting, marketing CD launches, basically getting a brand out there. It's all about networking and keeping the ideas fresh.

So would you say that your career path has differed from what you dreamed of as a child or the same?

When you are a kid you think that anything is possible. I really feel like I've lived up to that. A lot of people ask me "how did you find this job?" or "how you do all this traveling?" You have to go out there and do it! *[Laughs]* In school I learned that to be an entrepreneur ... you have to meet people and discover new ideas and not just dream about them, but actually put forth a proposal or guidelines to make things happen. And have the guts to do it. And follow through with it, for sure.

"It was amazing to see, because we caused major traffic back-ups and I've never seen so many happy people in a traffic jam."



Which leads us to ask about something gutsy you've done lately ... you were an MC for the Olympic torch run?

I was a drummer/MC/promoter ... I guess it's what we call a happiness ambassador. As goofy as that might sound, that's really what we were doing. It was our job to get people excited for the Olympics. We were on the road 15-16 hours a day, starting at about five in the morning, you had to be ready to adapt and go till 9 o'clock at night or so.

They were long days but one of the things I loved was nothing was routine. There were two parts to my job; the first part involved being five minutes ahead of the flame on the trucks – the happy trucks, that's what they were called – pumping people up and letting them know the flame is coming so that when the torch bearers run through it's the best day of their life. I might hand out samples of products or just MC, drum and put on a bit of a show.

We made sure people knew about us and it was so amazing to see, because we caused major traffic back-ups and I've never seen so many happy people in a traffic jam. They'd be out there with their cameras taking pictures, honking,

cheering and waving their flag or showing off their red mittens.

The other part of my job was being on the celebrations team. There was a lunch and evening celebration every day, which would include professional acts or celebrities coming in ... very high-quality professional parties. I would go to an event, set up and then be out there with the crowd to make sure people are smiling. You hand out product, showcase some of the Olympic stuff and then you take down, go to the next place and do it all over again.

How did you get picked for this?

My sister heard about the job so she passed the application on to me. I did some trial runs with Coca-Cola, in RVs and specialized vehicles to get people to sign up to be torch bearers. The process was heavily based on involvement with the crowd, attitude, ability to make people smile, time management and keeping your energy level up. I also think that having a degree from ESB was really helpful in getting picked.

Your dad is an entrepreneur and you grew up in that environment. Do you think that influenced you to take risks in life?



"The torch is kind of mysterious; it has a legacy to it. People know you are putting in long hours and they want to showcase their city and make sure your stay is enjoyable, so we got lots of home cooking along the way."

My whole family has been very influential, they are always pushing me to "go and enjoy your life, see what else is out there." There was always the option of working in the family business, but they wanted to make sure I didn't corner myself into working for Early's Farm & Garden Centre or any other business for 50 years. They recognized the importance of experiencing different jobs and they've always encouraged me to travel. I was able to study in France for seven months while I was in university, and it was absolutely amazing. When you are exposed to new ideas and new experiences you kind of get addicted to it! It's exciting to find out how other people run their business, market a product, or whatever it might be.

Did you meet anyone you consider to be a celebrity on your Canada-wide trek?

We met a lot of interesting people. The highlights were the torch bearer stories, because the majority of them were local heroes, maybe not the captain of the basketball team but his brother, or someone a little more in the shadow who deserves it just as much. I had friends in torch operations who prepped the celebrities on what to do, how to

hold the torch, what to wear and all that kind of stuff before they ran. My favourite story is about a celebrity *[who shall remain nameless]* who was slotted to run on the last day in Vancouver. He was the only person who had ever showed up late and the only things you really need to have with you are your uniform, toque and mitts (which were sent to you months prior). He showed up (late) with just his uniform, so my friend asked him where his toque was. *[John delivers a surprisingly accurate impersonation of nameless celebrity]* "What's a toque?" *[Laughs]* "The hat, you know." "At the hotel." *[Laughing]* "But Mr. *[nameless celebrity]*, you need your toque!" "Listen son, I haven't worn a hat in 30 years!" *[Laughing continues]* And then they had to find him some mitts.

You ran with the torch yourself. Was that pre-planned?

It was actually a great surprise. There were 300 of us on the torch crew, and every metre across Canada was planned down to the second. But there were always a few empty spots in case someone needed to be bumped or something happened to throw the schedule off. I ran in Edgewater, B.C. You get this wonderful feeling knowing

that you are the only one who will carry the Olympic flame for that period of time. There were 12,000 torch bearers that literally carried the torch across Canada and you are one of them ... it was a very amazing feeling of pride and joy.

Was the torch heavy?

It's not that heavy, only about 3-4 pounds with the butane fluid in it. But it is still a torch, and you can burn yourself. Sometimes people forget that!

Is it safe to say you felt a little bit like a rock star?

You do feel like a rock star being on the relay; people treat you differently when you have the uniform on. The torch is kind of mysterious; it has a legacy to it. People know you are putting in long hours and they want to showcase their city and make sure your stay is enjoyable, so we got lots of home cooking along the way.

So what would you say was your most memorable experience of the entire process?

It's tough to say ... the first highlight was when Sydney Crosby carried the flame. 15,000 people packed one block to see him! To see the excitement in people's faces every day as the torch came through was a highlight. Another that comes to mind is when we took the flame through Sault Ste. Marie on New Year's Eve. There was a wedding going on and the father of the bride convinced us to crash their wedding with the Olympic torch. They had the lights turned off for us and we lit the place up and within 30 seconds

the whole crowd started singing O Canada. The power of the torch, the power of the Olympic idea is so moving.

You travelled on many roads all across Canada – did you run into any extreme winter driving conditions that even a Saskatchewan boy couldn't handle?

One of my first interview questions was: "Can you handle driving in winter conditions?" The hiring was based out of Vancouver, so that was a very legit question. All I really said was "I am from Saskatchewan" and they said "OK, that's fine."

For the most part, the weather was absolutely ideal, but it wouldn't be a Canadian winter without hitting at least a three-week stretch of -20 c weather. The coldest place we visited was Timmins, Ont. It was -42 c and the whole town still came out for the evening celebration. We were reminded to treat every day like Day One, because for many people this is the only time they will ever get to witness the torch run.

So where did your tour end – did you get to take the torch to the Olympic Stadium?

We brought the torch right up to the last point, which is right outside the stadium. After that it was completely out of our hands and the relay was done. We got to walk the last kilometre with the torch as a team and it really was a bit of a transition to go from being in the spotlight in the torch run uniform back to a regular person on day 107.

Would you say this experience changed you as a person?

I've realized that you have to find a way to be happy no matter what. If you weren't having a good day on the relay, tough luck, you had to have a good day because you had to make other people have a good



day. You realize the importance of surrounding yourself with good people, having a good attitude and seeing the glass as half full.

Is there anything that you felt you learned from it, that you were surprised by or didn't expect?

Canada is an amazing country and you don't realize how friendly and how great Canadians are, until you go right across it. We are a very diverse multi-cultural community, and it was very helpful that I speak French because there were many areas across the country where my multi-lingual skills came in handy when acting as MC or giving out samples.

How do you think your business degree prepared you to do this?

The main things I took out of university are that you train yourself to think, to manage your time and to get involved and network; to balance those skills with a good attitude will get you anywhere. A business degree can be related to any sector; you always need to know how to manage money, network, and have an entrepreneurial spirit.

Where does your soft drink loyalty lie?

Coke definitely knows how to build a global brand, they treated us so well, and they wanted to make sure we are Coke for life – and I am.

Do you find yourself ever driving 7 km/hr just out of habit?

Not anymore, but after some of those days you show up at the hotel exhausted, waving at people in the elevator and you still have that smile on your face and people wonder what you're on.

What's next for you? How do you top this?

I'll be working on a Caribbean cruise line as a social host. I think it's going to be relay light – fun in the sun with a lot of laid-back people.

Do you have any closing comments or advice?

Everyone gets to choose how they live; you can enjoy what you do or you can make it a job and it will seem like work. I think more businesses today are hiring based on attitude, time management and interpersonal skills over training. Especially in troubled economic times, you have to branch out, solve problems and work together in diverse situations. I once had a professor say "you are your own brand" and that statement really resonated with me. People want to see that you are the same person whether you are sitting in a board room or in a social environment or on Facebook. Always be yourself and never stray from that, be proud of who you are and make the most of it. 🇨🇦