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Go-getter

For most mortals, when it comes to workload, running a nine-employee brokerage would suffice. Not for Manitoba's Greg Barrows, a former crew chief with Ducks Unlimited and research associate with Agriculture Canada. When he isn't taking care of business as the owner of Cameron Agencies in Melita and Pierson, Barrows is presiding over the energy firm Melita Resources, which has drilled 14 horizontal oil wells since 2012 and now produces 500 barrels of sweet crude per day. "Greg is a real go-getter," says a friend. "He gets passionate about things."

By Ron Shorvoyce

When Greg Barrows joined the workforce 16 years ago, he set a goal to become an entrepreneur. Today, at age 38, he is exactly that. Barrows owns Cameron Agencies in Melita and Pierson, which are near the Saskatchewan border in southwest Manitoba. He is also a founding member of a local oil and gas exploration company.

It all happened rather quickly for Barrows, who grew up in Hartney, population 400, northeast of Melita. His father Jack farmed in the area and worked for Manitoba Highways. Mother Barb looked after the home front.

Barrows earned a bachelor of science degree in 1998 from the University of Brandon. He had a special interest in wildlife and conservation and considered making it a career. It didn't hurt either that he and his father enjoyed hunting and fishing. Even before graduating university he

was working for Manitoba Conservation and Ducks Unlimited. When he finished school Barrows went to full time with Ducks Unlimited.

"During the summer I did radio telemetry," he says. "We tracked ducks, studying their nesting habits and habitat. I worked out of Minnedosa, but soon I was promoted to research and worked out of Oak Hammock Marsh, a huge conservation and interpretive area north of Winnipeg. It's also the national headquarters of Ducks Unlimited."

In 1999 he was appointed crew chief with Ducks Unlimited and worked in Saskatchewan for a time in Watrous and Hanley.

"We caught, trapped and banded ducks and had the females surgically fitted with a small radio tracking device a little smaller than your thumb. We released birds where they were caught, and would track them and study movement patterns, where they nested and what habitat they lived in."

Though it was interesting work, it was not the career Barrows wanted. In 2000 he took a job doing agricultural research with a company called Ag Quest. He bought a 700-square-foot house in Hartney for \$1,500, selling it a

few years later for \$7,500. other one-third share of the business. He also bought McMaster Insurance, a small competitor in Melita. He purchased Murray Cameron's remaining shares in January 2013.

Fellow broker Jason McKelvy, who runs a third-generation agency in MacGregor, a town of about 1,000 people, describes Barrows as "bright, energetic and not afraid to take on anything." The two met at a brokers function about 10 years ago.

"Greg is a real networker," McKelvy says. "He bounces stuff off a few of us and keeps in touch regularly. I don't mind helping him out because we're not working the same area. Melita is three hours away from here. He's very outgoing and is one of those guys who can go anywhere and he knows somebody. He knows his stuff in the general insurance industry and does a lot of life insurance, too, which leads to estate planning and that type of thing."

Not content to simply run the agency, Barrows decided to get into the oil and gas business. The area around Melita is known for its light sweet crude oil deposits. In July 2012 Barrows teamed

up with a few other people in the area to form Melita Resources, of which he is president. The company has grown significantly in a short time.

"We've drilled 14 horizontal wells since 2012, and we're now producing 500 barrels of sweet crude a day."

Dwight Logeot of Carroll, south of Brandon, has known Barrows for 35 years. He owns a farm equipment dealership and tire store.

"Greg is a real go-getter," Logeot says, "a very aggressive, business-minded entrepreneur. He's opinionated and strong-minded, and he's good with people, very upbeat. He gets passionate about things."

Barrows continues to grow the brokerage. Besides general and commercial cover, Cameron Agencies handles investments, life insurance and group benefits. The business also has a real estate arm. There are now nine staffers, including its

owner, which is up from the six on board when he joined the business in 2004.

Barrows has purchased 4,000 square feet of office space in Melita which has been renovated to accommodate future expansion. IP

kerage owned by brothers Murray and Greg Cameron. Barrows went to work for the agency on the understanding he could buy into the business as a partner.

"Everybody said I was crazy to leave my government job. I went from having a pension to no pension, from benefits to no benefits."

Barrows says it was the right decision. He quickly got licensed to sell general insurance.

"I was running the Autopac machine at the brokerage and getting to know more people. I was writing tenants' policies and learning farm policies. Life insurance and financial planning I found interesting; the Autopac, not so much. But I found it a conduit to get to know people and make contacts so that I could do the things I like."

Barrows soon purchased a third of Cameron Agencies.

"I had to come up with a fair-sized down payment," he says. "I used everything I'd saved and maxed out my line of credit. For the next five years I worked my butt off."

In January 2009, when Greg Cameron decided to retire, Barrows bought an-



McKelvy



Logeot

VITAL STATS

- Barrows is a director of the Insurance Brokers Association of Manitoba and sits on advisory boards for some mutual insurance companies.
- He and wife Crysti, a homemaker, have two children, John, 9, and Clara, 6. The family lives on a farm west of Hartney in a large bi-level house they built in 2010.
- Both his parents are semi-retired on their farm in Hartney. He has one sister, Tammy, a high school principal in Russell, Man.
- Barrows still enjoys hunting locally, including bow hunting, and he has hunted mule deer in Alberta. "Last year I went to within four miles of the Nunavut border for caribou."
- He flies a 90-horsepower Champ, which is similar to a Cessna 150.
- His grandfather, Wes Agnew, was a flight instructor in the Second World War. He was a collector of aircraft and a co-founder of the Brandon Aviation Museum. A street at the airport in Brandon, Agnew Drive, was named after him. IP