



Dwight Heppner, wife Meagan and daughters Cameron and Danyel



# A rare breed

**Dwight Heppner describes himself as “a rare breed” in the insurance industry. He spent eight years as a full-time broker with the MIG Insurance Group in Winkler, Man. before turning his attention to the forever-evolving IT side of the firm’s business. This makes the largely self-taught Heppner one of the few in the industry who understands the technological aspects of running a brokerage and the challenges brokers face in adapting to new technology. By Ron Shorvoyce**

**D**wight Heppner’s got the best of both worlds. He has a keen interest in technology, and he enjoys working in the insurance industry. The two make a good fit for his role as IT manager for Manitoba’s MIG Insurance Group.

The firm was launched in 1995 by Brian and Susan Gilbert. Along with managing partners Rob Suderman and Doug Fast, a strong leadership team and 55 dedicated team members, they have been able to grow MIG to nine locations throughout the Keystone Province – five in Winnipeg, two in Portage la Prairie and one each in Winkler and St. Claude.

Heppner was born and raised in Winkler, a town of about 10,000 people 100 km south of the provincial capital. He attended the town’s Garden Valley

Collegiate, graduating in 1998, and then took a one-year business course at Red River College.

“The curriculum included an IT course, and I took tech classes in high school,” says Heppner, 35. “When I look back at it, the IT course wasn’t anything close to what we use today. But when I joined MIG in Winkler, this was the path for me to move up in the company.”

It took him a while to get into insurance. After finishing the business course he went to work for an uncle at Sunvalley Tire in Winkler, where he had a chance to become manager. But because of shoulder surgery due to a hockey injury – he played Junior B in his younger years – he wasn’t able to continue doing the job. He joined MIG in 2002.

“Rob Suderman, one of the partners and manager of the Winkler office, was a family friend. I started out working on Autopac and personal lines.”

He took the Fundamentals of Insurance course and soon acquired his CAIB 2, 3 and 4. He spent the next eight years working as a broker with MIG before turning his attention to the IT end of things.

“I enjoyed the insurance business a lot, but when I saw the opportunity to switch to IT, I was ready. I enjoyed that end of the business and saw it as being more company-involved. Brian and Susan (Gilbert) saw that they could use me as a resource and that I was capable of handling IT. They saw it as an avenue that was needed within the company, and I’m grateful to them for the opportunity. It started out as me being a broker for two or three days and an IT guy for the rest of the week. The IT position morphed into a full-time role.”

Heppner says he first got some help from MIG’s third-party server tech about the ins and outs of solving user issues. Much of what he had to know to be the firm’s IT manager, however, is self-taught.

“The interest in IT came mostly from within. I’ve always wanted to be on top of the technological world.”

An old friend, Randy Unger, describes Heppner as someone who is “dedicated

and hard-working, willing to learn new things.” Unger owns Advance Blinds and Drapery in Plum Coulee, a community of 900 people an hour’s drive southwest of Winnipeg. Unger, who has known Heppner and the Heppner family for 20 years, has his insurance with MIG.

“I managed a hockey team Dwight played for,” Unger says. “We visit back and forth regularly. He likes a challenge, which is important in the IT business because it’s always changing. And he’s

very good with people; he puts them at ease.”

Heppner says MIG is dedicated to being innovative, forward-thinking and using industry-leading technology. He collaborates with Susan Gilbert, the firm’s vp, on marketing and communications, employing the latest in technological applications.

“My work is not just finding ways to solve user issues. I work closely with Susan to make sure everything gets off the ground with our email marketing and online promotions. I also see to it our website and portal stay up to date.”

He travels to the firm’s locations and teaches new staff how to use company systems. He also does maintenance work when computers go down.

“I wear a lot of different hats; it keeps me busy and on my toes. If there are errors on the software side, I get an email or a phone call. We’ve got about 60 people working for the brokerage, so it can be demanding.”

Brett McGregor, president of Guild Insurance in Brandon, is a close associate. The two met about 10 years ago through Manitoba’s young brokers’ organization.

“He really knows his IT stuff,” McGregor says. “Having worked as a broker gives him a big advantage. Dwight is a good guy who’s a lot of fun to be around. He’s very personable.”

Heppner says MIG’s dedication to technology allows the staff to be quicker and more efficient.

“With the online world and the way people are trying to do business now, we want to make sure we have the Internet channel available to our clients. We want them to have the ability to quickly contact us by email or to be able to go to



Unger



McGregor

our website and have direct contact with a broker by giving them their own client portal. Our clients are able to see their documents online and have access to their broker whenever they need to.”

Heppner says with his insurance and technological background, he’s a rare breed in the industry. He has a good understanding of both sides of the business – the technological aspects of running a brokerage and the challenges brokers face in adapting to new technology.

He says his goal is to stay with MIG for the long-term. Someday he hopes to play a larger role in the company. ■

## VITAL STATS

- Heppner and Meagan, his wife of 10 years, have two daughters – Danyel, 8, and Cameron, 5. Meagan has her own graphic design business, working from home.
- He likes listening to “anything from classic rock to the new stuff. Some country, too, once in a while.”
- He plays in a senior hockey league.
- Heppner golfs with friends, in company golf tournaments and with his wife. “I’m average.”
- In the summers the Heppners enjoy spending time at his parents’ cabin at Moose Lake, an hour and a half southeast of Niverville, where they live in a two-storey contemporary home, and at his in-laws’ cabin in Pleasant Valley, a two-hour drive west of Niverville.
- The family tries to take vacations together. “Through work, I’ve been able to attend software conventions. The last one was in Orlando in September, and we got to take in Disney World.”
- He follows the fortunes of the Toronto Blue Jays and the Winnipeg Jets.
- His mother Ruth is a bookkeeper at a pharmacy in Winkler. His dad Ike works as a supervisor for a farm operation near Winkler.
- Heppner has two brothers and a sister. The youngest brother, Brendan, works for Rempel Insurance in Morris. The middle brother, Dereck, works for an electrical supply company in Winnipeg. Sister Michelle teaches school in Winkler.
- He has served as chair of Manitoba’s Young Broker committee. “It was a great experience and a huge building block for my career.” ■