

Grad puts best foot forward

It's a long way from centre court at Wimbledon where he once presented a cheque worth \$1 million to tennis star Martina Navratilova in the Playtex Challenge Tennis Tournament.

And it's been a few years since he last attended a garden party at Buckingham Palace.

But St. Jerome's graduate John Stevenson (BA '69) is firmly back in Canada now after living and working in Europe and the United Kingdom. Here he tends to the more mundane tasks of ensuring that his \$30-million-plus shoe manufacturing operation remains competitive and viable in a market fraught with uncertainty. John is President of the H.H. Brown Shoe Company (Canada) Ltd., one of Canada's largest footwear manufacturers.

From his office in the heart of Toronto's financial district, John Stevenson recently discussed his globetrotting career and current work.

The year was 1969 and, with his arts degree in hand, John pursued a path common to many arts grads. He entered Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto and successfully completed his first year. But law didn't seem to hold his interest and he accepted a position as Sales Representative with Procter and Gamble in 1970.

He had obviously found his niche and progressed through all levels of line sales management to the position of National Sales Merchandising manager in 1976. His career was just beginning to take off.

When the opportunity to become general sales manager with Playtex Canada arose, John took on the new challenge. This included responsibility for a sales volume in excess of \$20 million and the training and development of a staff of 45 managers and sales representatives.

Canada's borders could not contain John's success with Playtex. In 1979 he became the company's Director of Sales for Europe and, though based in Madrid, Spain, worked in 15 different countries. In Europe, Playtex manufactures a wide range of products from shampoo to bug spray to dog food.

"I once thought that everything ended in North America," he recalls, "until I spent time with my family in Europe. The rich cultural differences provided a wonderful education for all of us."

With responsibility for a sales volume in excess of \$50 million, John was appointed Commercial Director with Playtex U.K. and was in charge of all sales and marketing activities in all of the company's British divisions including Danskin leisure wear.

John's managerial skills were required back in Canada and he and his family returned in 1982 when John became General Manager of the Apparel Division of Playtex Canada. Under his leadership the division showed improved profits for consecutive years.

With success came a desire for new challenges and change. When the opportunity to become President of a major company arose in



1984, John joined the H.H. Brown Shoe Co. (Canada) Ltd. in its top job. It was his chance to completely direct all aspects of the company's Canadian operations. Brown manufactures safety footwear and cowboy boots at its two Quebec plants and employs nearly 500 people there and in sales offices across Canada.

Even a cursory reading of the daily newspaper will show you that the Canadian shoe manufacturing industry is experiencing difficult times. Less expensive foreign imports and escalating domestic costs pose difficult challenges. John Stevenson acknowledges these challenges.

"Maintaining full employment in an industry under intense pressure from foreign imports is one of my major preoccupations." He cites improved profitability as another challenge, since the type of footwear manufactured by Brown is price sensitive. "You build your business by gaining market share, not necessarily by expensive advertising and merchandising as is done in traditional consumer packaged goods."

To this end, John spends 40% of his time travelling to shoe shows across Canada and in meeting with major suppliers.

"I believe there will always be room for domestic manufacturers in specialized areas. However, with offshore competition, large manufacturers of fashion footwear may not survive."

John spends a good deal of his time travelling to Ottawa relating to business with the federal government, and in some cases on policy as it relates to the Canadian footwear industry. He is a Director of the Canadian Shoe Manufacturer's Association and chairs its finance committee. He has also lobbied with cabinet ministers on an ad hoc basis on behalf of the footwear industry.

"There is no question that some kind of protection is required to guarantee the long term viability of Canadian footwear manufacturers. The future of tariffs or quotas is uncertain given the current free trade talks underway between Canada and the United States. If there is a free trade agreement, I think Brown

is specialized enough that we could compete favourably," he maintains.

Away from a demanding work schedule, John and his wife Anne Marie (née Felice BA '69) also a St. Jerome's graduate, enjoy time together with their children Brian, 12, and Julie 8. Anne Marie has a BEd from the University of Toronto and taught in Ottawa and Toronto before their children were born. She is chairperson of the Block Parent Organization of Oakville, where the Stevensons make their home.

Coaching minor hockey and his daughter's soccer team occupies many of John's evenings and weekends, but the entire Stevenson family found time to be a part of the SJC Grads' Association reunion weekend recently. Among his other interests John enjoys golf and was a Big Brother to a boy from a father-absent home for five years. Spending a lot of his time on planes and in hotels, he reads at least one book every week and finds the best seller's list and political memoirs are his favourites.

Orientation Mass to be broadcast coast to coast

The annual outdoor Orientation Mass of our University Catholic Community will have a wider audience this year than the familiar few hundred students and friends who gather to inaugurate the new school year.

The CBC Television programme, *Meeting Place* will broadcast, as its first show of the season, our Sept. 13 orientation Mass on Sunday, September 20, at 12:00 noon. The show will be seen across Canada on the CBC network and will afford our graduates a special opportunity to relive an important part of their College experience.

The programme will also feature footage of the orientation week activities, interviews with students and College personnel and, of course, the Mass itself.

St. Jerome's College was chosen from among Canadian universities because of its strong reputation for a vibrant campus ministry programme. Its quality and depth is envied across Canada and this broadcast recognizes this reputation.

A strong liturgical life continues to be at the heart of our campus ministry programme. So tune in on Sunday, September 20, at 12:00 noon (12:30 in Newfoundland).

A report on faculty and staff changes will appear in the Fall issue of **Update!**