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Volume Eight, Issue 1

The next Bad Boy will be a girl!

**DONALD COOPER
ON TRAINING**

**GOEASY'S
BEATING HEART**

**HIGH POINT
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retailers from this country. What we present here is just a snapshot of what was offered to those buyers and designers who attended the spring 2019 edition, which ended its five-day run in early April.

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In a departure from his normal musings, HGO publisher and editor Michael Knell takes a moment to lament the current political climate our country finds itself in. After all, what goes on around us has an impact on our business. The affairs of state influence our customers and impact our prosperity. Right now, we're confronted with a lot of nonsense. He promises to stop noticing and focus instead solely on the industry.

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While many furniture operations are family-owned and run, not every brand becomes famous in large part because of the dynamic, memorable and politically legendary family at its helm. For Samantha Lastman, carrying on the family business is challenging, but the youthful business whiz with a famous last name wouldn't have it any other way. Our 'Next Generation' profile was written by contributing editor Ashley Newport.

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The High Point Market is the largest furniture trade show in the world, spread over 180 building and some 11 million square feet of display space. In addition to some 80-plus Canadian resources, most of its exhibitors are interested in do business with



ON OUR COVER: The next Bad Boy will be a girl! Samantha Lastman (centre), daughter of Blayne (left) and granddaughter of Mel (right), is high impact promoter's director of business development who jumped into the deep end of the retailer's pool after spending the best part of a decade working for others.

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MICHAEL J. KNELL

Leadership matters

What goes on around us has an impact on our business. The affairs of state influence our customers and impact our prosperity. Right now, we're confronted with a lot of nonsense.

I FREELY ADMIT I'M BEGINNING TO GET A LITTLE WORRIED. THE HOUSING market is cooling, in terms of both starts and re-sales. Retail sales are certainly softening. The U.S. Congress is making noise about re-opening the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement – the rather odd name for NAFTA 2.0 – that our government is rightly resisting. It was hard enough to get the first one. To make matters worse, we are suffering from a serious lack of leadership in this country, at both the federal and provincial levels.

Usually I'm a big fan of ignoring politics. I haven't missed an opportunity to vote since I came of age and I follow national affairs in all the usual ways. If I'm perfectly honest, I've voted for candidates from all three major parties at one time or another. But now I can't tell them apart anymore. When it comes to the making and selling furniture and mattresses and what it takes to reach the consumer, I really don't care who the person I'm conversing with votes for.

There are serious issues that need to be dealt with and for the most part they're being ignored. For the past several weeks, the lead story has been about the legal troubles of a Montreal-based engineering firm. No one has explained the hard facts, but after they are found, it's not hard to conclude the leaders of all three parties are whiny children clamouring for the spotlight. They don't know how to deal with our real problems, so they're using this as a diversion.

Then you have the provinces. We have one obsessed with religious symbols, another consumed with pumping oil to the exclusion of everything else and another whose sole focus is to undo everything done by the previous government whether it had merit or not.

Leadership matters. We have real issues in this country. We need to improve the standard of living. We need to create the jobs of tomorrow. We need to protect the environment. We need to improve the education system. The list of things our country and our people need is getting longer every day. But I don't hear any of the current crop of elected ones talking about anything that matters.

We deserve better. We should start demanding better. You don't need me to tell you how.

Michael J. Knell
Publisher & Editor
mknell@homegoodsonline.ca



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PUBLISHER & EDITOR

Michael J. Knell

mknell@homegoodsonline.ca

MARKETING DIRECTOR

Corrie-Ann Knell

marketing@homegoodsonline.ca

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Ashley Newport

ashley@homegoodsonline.ca

CONTRIBUTOR

Donald Cooper

Greg Simpson

ART DIRECTOR

Samantha Edwards

Sam I Am Creative

samiamcreative@gmail.com

IT DIRECTOR

Jayne Cousins

In House Logic

websmith@inhouselogic.com

PUBLISHED BY

Windsor Bay Communications Inc.

P.O. Box 3023, 120 Ontario Street

Brighton, Ontario K0K 1H0

T: 613.475.4704

F: 613.475.0829

Michael J. Knell, Managing Partner

PUBLISHERS OF

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NOOOOBODY

DOES IT LIKE A LASTMAN

While many--if not most--furniture operations are family-owned and run, not every brand becomes famous in large part because of the dynamic, memorable and politically legendary family at its helm. For Samantha Lastman, carrying on the family business is challenging, but the youthful business whiz with a famous last name wouldn't have it any other way. **BY ASHLEY NEWPORT**

Samantha Lastman (centre) is seen here with her father, Blayne Lastman (left), the company's chairman and chief executive officer and grandfather Mel Lastman (right), who founded the chain in 1955 and sold it after embarking on lengthy career in politics as mayor of North York and, later, the amalgamated City of Toronto.

MOST INDEPENDENT, MID-SIZE furniture, mattress and appliance retailers are run by families – some quite well known. But few are quite as locally famous as Bad Boy Furniture, a thriving Greater Toronto Area operation that's forever linked to its charismatic and colourful founder, former Toronto (and North York) mayor Mel Lastman.

But while almost anyone in his catchment area can picture Mel gleefully shouting “Nooooobody!” in myriad television and radio spots, not everyone realises one of the younger

members of the Lastman clan is doing her part to keep the family business – now led by Mel's son, Blayne Lastman – innovative and fresh.

Samantha Lastman, the retailer's director of business development, recently decided to leave the high-intensity consulting world and dedicate her time and energy to keeping the locally legendary furniture operation competitive in a challenging retail landscape.

“I began my career at Bad Boy in October of 2016,” she told *Home Goods Online*, adding the position is her first foray into the furniture industry.

“Prior to starting, I was working as a systems, applications and products (SAP) consultant at IBM,” she explains, “Now, my job title is director of business development, but I do a little bit of everything.”

For those living outside the GTA, the Bad Boy story might not be as familiar. The brand's journey began in 1955 when Mel Lastman opened the first Bad Boy store on Weston Road. The store, which became popular for its reasonable price points and well-regarded service, was also beloved for its owner's more lovable antics.

The senior Lastman became something of a Toronto celebrity in large part because of his creative publicity stunts. In fact, he once decided to start selling two-dollar bills for one dollar, coining the initiative as the “best two-for-one deal you could find.”

In 1972, Mel Lastman ran for and was elect- ▶





ed mayor of North York. Three years later he decided to sell Bad Boy, which had grown substantially over those four decades.

But while Mel Lastman would remain a mainstay in Toronto's political scene for many years to come, the furniture retailing operation eventually went out of business in the late 1980s. In 1991, Mel's son (and Samantha's father), Blayne Lastman vowed to continue the Bad Boy legacy and bought back the name and re-launched the franchise with a single store on Toronto's 'furniture row' – Kennedy Road. Within a very few years, the store count was up to five.

Now, the operation boasts 10 stores and a distribution centre (it's 11th store is opening this year) and employs 350 people. As far as products go, Bad Boy offers a substantial selection of mid-price goods, ranging from upholstery and case goods to major appliances to consumer electronics.

GROWING NORMALLY IN A FAMOUS FAMILY

What was it like growing up in a famous family? For the youngest Lastman, it was simply... normal.

"It was great, we're a very busy family and very busy people," she says. "I was born when [Mel Lastman] was mayor, so I didn't know any different. When you're born into it, you don't really notice it."

But while the Bad Boy brand and its iconic commercials loomed large while Lastman was growing up, she didn't plan to transition into a leadership role – or any role, really – at the company straight out of school.

"I started my career as an SAP consultant. I worked with clients all over the world and travelled to meet their needs. My favourite part of my job was seeing a business problem or opportunity and finding a system to resolve it. I was 23 when I started consulting and left about three years later. It was a great job – high energy, busy and so fun. The culture was very young, and the majority of employees were able to travel weekly," she recalls.

Lastman's demanding and challenging position gave her opportunities to travel and learn the ins and outs of the business world – a world that had always fascinated her.

"I always liked the idea of running my own business. I didn't go straight from school to Bad Boy because as a kid with no other experience, it's hard to add that much value. I entered a job that wasn't going to be a good fit forever. I travelled from Monday to Thursday. I consulted on projects for retail, pharmaceutical, government, and other industries. I travelled anywhere from places in Ontario to India to Montreal to the United States," she says.

Ultimately, the move to Bad Boy made sense because Lastman had amassed valuable ►

An exterior view of the newest member of the Lastman's Bad Boy chain of ten stores, mostly in the Greater Toronto Area, the relocated and renovated out in Burlington, Ontario.



Merchandising, marketing and buying are also part of Samantha Lastman's purview.

"I see this business growing first through Ontario, and then nationally. This growth will come from increasing our number of stores, growing our e-commerce platform and expanding our builder divisions."

experience and was ready to invest her time, energy and skills into the business her father and grandfather loved (and love) so much.

"I wanted to change my career and to have more of a vested interest in the company. I wanted a role that is expansive and where I can make an impact. I think timing was everything for me, a lot of things fell into place. The company was at a great point and I was looking into buying a house at the time, making it a great time to join the family business."

AN EXPANSIVE ROLE

As director of business development, Samantha Lastman works across all the retailer's various departments which keeps things both challenging and exciting.

"My role at Bad Boy is extremely broad where I'm able to work in all divisions. Right now, I'm heavily involved in our e-commerce business, which is growing at an exponential rate. I'm involved in our customer service department and in our builder division (Bad Boy sells products to developers of new buildings such as condos). I'm very involved in our new store opening and I attend furniture shows as a buyer," she says.

To make the transition happen Lastman approached her father informally to sell herself as a good fit for the brand.

"I scheduled breakfast with my dad and essentially applied without a resume. We talked about it in a real capacity and what I saw as a logical place for me considering my education and consulting experience," she says.

While it's not abnormal for multiple family members to gravitate to the family business,

thus far she's the only one of Blayne's children to take on a role at Bad Boy. Her younger brother is currently in law school and her fiancé (Lastman is engaged to be married in May) builds custom homes.

That said, Bad Boy is very much a family business – something that comes with both benefits and challenges.

"I think the biggest challenge – and there are two major ones – is being in my position at 29 and being relatively new. It's also hard because you care [about a family business] so much and it's hard if you care a lot. You also have a personal life and professional life with all of these people and that's hard."

Lastman points out some of the unique ways a management role in a family-run operation differs from simply working in a retail outfit as a more casual employee. In short, the pressure is always on.

"If you're worried about a snowstorm that will impact sales, you're up all night. If you're an employee, that might not worry you in the same way. If a truck breaks down, I have to find out how we'll resolve it and how we'll tell customers. When you're heavily invested, you care so much about all the departments."

When asked if her father always wanted her to join the business, she says there was never any pressure to work at one of the GTA's most famous furniture companies – but her decision to join the brand certainly didn't disappoint anyone.

"It's something he always wanted, but my dad is a very logical parent and he didn't want to push his kids to work in the family business. When I was recruiting for school and I had a few job offers, he would never say to join him instead because he wanted me to find my path and figure out my life. He was so happy when I brought it up. People I've known since I was three who are like my family, they told me that he had been hoping I would join."

A MILLENNIAL PERSPECTIVE

Lastman's analytical mind also made her a perfect fit for the company. "I like math and managing, and that's where I find passion at work. I'm not into any form of arts, I'm much more of a number's person. I've always been interested in business," she says.

And while her millennial perspective makes her an ideal leader at a time when so many companies are only now – and some with incredible hesitation – agreeing to let technology into their more traditional operations, Lastman says Bad Boy has always been forward thinking. ►

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Samantha Lastman is seen here alongside her father, Blayne, at the opening of the relocated and renovated Lastman's Bad Boy in Burlington, Ontario. Organising grand openings is part of the younger Lastman's responsibilities as director of business development.

It does have its own e-commerce store (which went online four years ago) after all. "Bad Boy is one of the most flexible companies I've ever seen," Lastman says.

"Making a change isn't like turning the Titanic," she continues. "There's no bureaucracy, it's just efficient. As times change, some people have a hard time adapting, but we're good with change, we capitalise."

Lastman also notes while the company's principal decision makers vary in age everyone is open to change and new ideas – even if they don't quite understand technology or social media.

"Some people don't totally understand e-commerce, but they're comfortable being uncomfortable. I think you have to accept that you don't know everything, even if you've worked there for years. We're early adopters of tech for our size."

If there's one thing Lastman has an abundance of – besides the energy to help run a locally famous company most people in the GTA have fond memories of – it's enthusiasm for a long and satisfying career in one of Canada's more challenging industries.

"I'm going to stay with the company forever," she says, adding she doesn't expect her father to step away from the company anytime soon. "He's never retiring, he'll work until he's 100, it's just his style. Blayne is a pillar of the company both from a daily operations perspective and also as a leader. He is involved from bolts to nuts and his daily running of the business is not something I would ever want to lose."

Still, the younger Lastman won't hesitate to take on more roles as they come up. "I'm finding that as I get more comfortable with certain departments, I'm taking on more. Sometimes if I see a need for more, I'll jump in."

As for what the future holds for Bad Boy, Lastman sees steady growth ahead. "I see this business growing first through Ontario, and then nationally. This growth will come from increasing our number of stores, growing our e-commerce platform and expanding our builder divisions."

Naturally, her plans for her own career are tied to the company she loves. "When you work as closely with a company as I do, those objectives become the same."

Lastman says it's important to remember that while furniture and appliance retailing is a challenging business, it's also fun. "I would tell [new employees] that it's a tough business and it's a fun business. It's a ton of fun, but it's tough in the sense that retail is hard to get into right now and while e-commerce is great, it's not geared to products of a huge size. It's a hard business in the Ontario market. It has a few major players who are 10 and 12 times our size," she says. "It's hard work, but it's worth it, No questions asked." **HGO**

A contributing editor to HGO Merchandiser, ASHLEY NEWPORT is a Toronto-based freelance journalist who writes primarily for trade and business publications. Her specialties include food, hospitality and emerging social/business trends.



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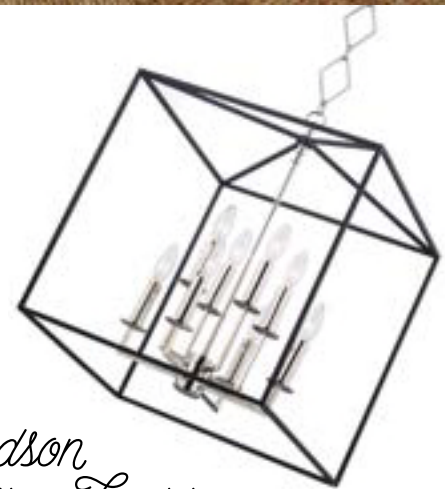
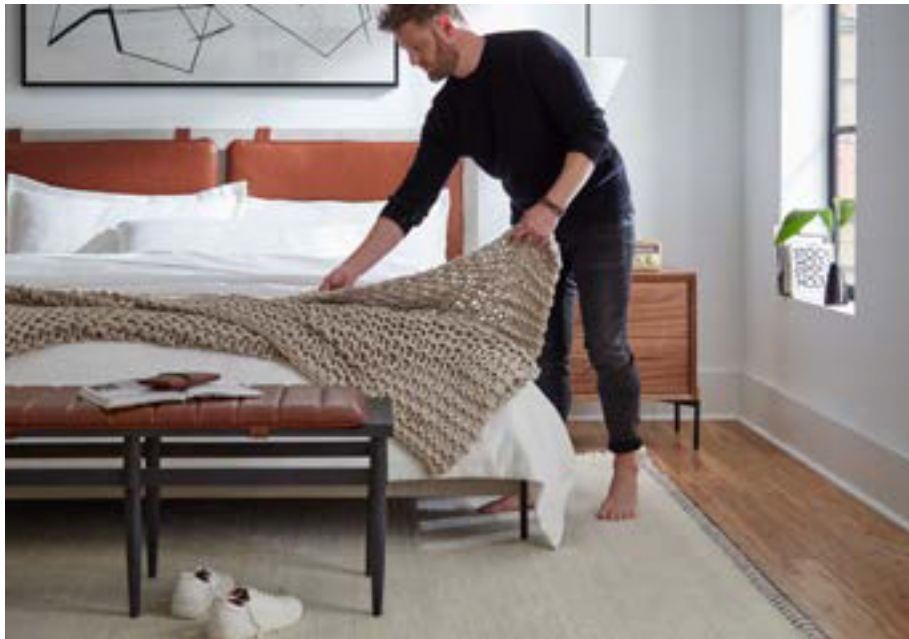
Palliser

This bedroom group is from the Shore collection, created by designer and TV personality Sarah Richardson in collaboration with Palliser Furniture. Launched at the High Point Market, it's the first-ever collaboration Canada's largest furniture maker has undertaken with a celebrity designer.

Spring in High Point

THE HIGH POINT MARKET is the largest furniture trade show in the world, spread over 180 building and some 11 million square feet of display space. In addition to some 80-plus Canadian resources, most of its exhibitors are interested in do business with retailers from this country.

What we present here is just a snapshot of what was offered to those buyers and designers who attended the spring 2019 edition, which ended its five-day run in early April. For the record, outside of the United States, Canada is the event's largest contributor of both exhibitors (approximately 80 show) and attendees.



Hudson Valley Lighting

Hudson Valley Lighting unveiled this new lighting fixture, part of new collection created by designer, blogger, and trendsetter Becki Owens, who is widely known for her fresh, feminine, "Pinterest-dream-home-worthy" designs which are inspired by the California coastal town where she lives and works.

A.R.T.

The California-based A.R.T. Furniture, which does some business in Canada, has launched a new collection from Bobby Berk, the interior designer and star of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. He is seen here with the Kirkeby upholstered panel bed. ▶

Sunpan

The uniquely crafted wine Jade cabinet from Sunpan will add a transitional allure to any dining space or foyer. Made from acacia wood veneer with two cabinets doors and shelving for ample storage. Alternating wood grain patterns on the doors and antique brass hardware complete the look.



Durham

This poster bed is the signature piece of Durham Furniture's Studio 19 collection. Unveiled at the High Point Market, this ten-piece bedroom group is constructed in solid maple and will be featured in a new finish called Mineral Gray, a blend of contemporary silver and gray tones and offered in any of the Canadian manufacturer's 50 or so finishes.



South Shore

New from South Shore Furniture is the London collection, whose industrial style harmonises wood and metal to create a warm and trendy décor while retaining the charm of its raw materials. It features a two-tone finish, a platform bed and virtually endless storage spaces. ▶

Elran

The 7000 series from Elran is part of its new “Art of Options” collection. The consumer has a choice of four different arms, two seats and backs with optional power recliners and adjustable headrests. The retailer can create 16 different models with hundreds of configurations and covers.



G. Romano

The Frances collection from G. Romano exudes a contemporary flair and was designed to deliver the versatility the current generation of consumers expect from a sofa with its easy to reconfigure modular construction. Its combination of memory foam seat, pillow-like back and armrests delivers sublime comfort and the ultimate union of formal and cool.

Gus Modern

Gus Modern has updated its best-selling Jane upholstery series. The Jane 2 retains the iconic, mid-century look while adding contemporary enhancements. Piped upholstery edges and button-tufted cushions create photogenic surface details that are enhanced by its more refined proportions. A new wood base is inset on each piece, creating a sense of weightlessness that maximizes light and space. It's seen here on a walnut finished base and upholstered in a fabric called Stockholm Camel.



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GoEasy's *beating heart*

It doesn't get a lot of public attention, but Easyhome remains an integral part of GoEasy's overall business. After years of losing ground, the lease-to-own merchant stabilised in 2018 and while future growth won't be trailblazing, the bleeding has stopped.

BY MICHAEL J. KNELL

Steven Poole, GoEasy senior vice president of operations and merchandising, is focused on the future of Easyhome, which remains this country's largest lease-to-own merchant.

THE LEASE-TO-OWN BUSINESS HAS changed radically over the past decade or so. Forty years ago, most couples starting out in life thought nothing of renting their first television. After all, in those days these electronic devices were expensive in relation to the family income. But in many ways, they aren't all that different from traditional retailers and are subject to same economic forces.

When we profiled David Ingram, then president and chief executive officer of Easyhome back in 2011, he stressed they were, indeed, retailers. "We see ourselves as retailers because we do all of the things that retailers do," he told us back then. "How we fund the sale is what makes us different."

It should be noted he's now executive chairman of GoEasy, the corporate parent fashioned in 2015 to house both Easyhome and Easyfinancial, the short-term consumer loan specialist launched in 2006.

Since the financial crisis of 2008, Easyfinancial has been the company's star performer. It's grown exponentially over the past few years and has captured the attention – and the adoration – of Bay Street analysts. In 2018, Easyfinancial accounted for 72.8% of GoEasy's total revenue. That's \$368.3 million of

\$506.2 million. The year prior, it accounted for 65.8% total revenue.

Easyfinancial's loan portfolio is expected to break through the \$1 billion barrier sometime in the next 18 months or so. In fact, when reading GoEasy's quarterly and annual reports – it's one of the four publicly-held furniture retailers in this country (the others being Leon's Furniture Limited; Sleep Country Canada Holdings; and, BMTC Group) – one could easily come to the conclusion Easyfinancial is the only part of the company that matters.

But senior management says that's not true. Easyhome remains the beating heart of the company and the foundation on which everything else is built.

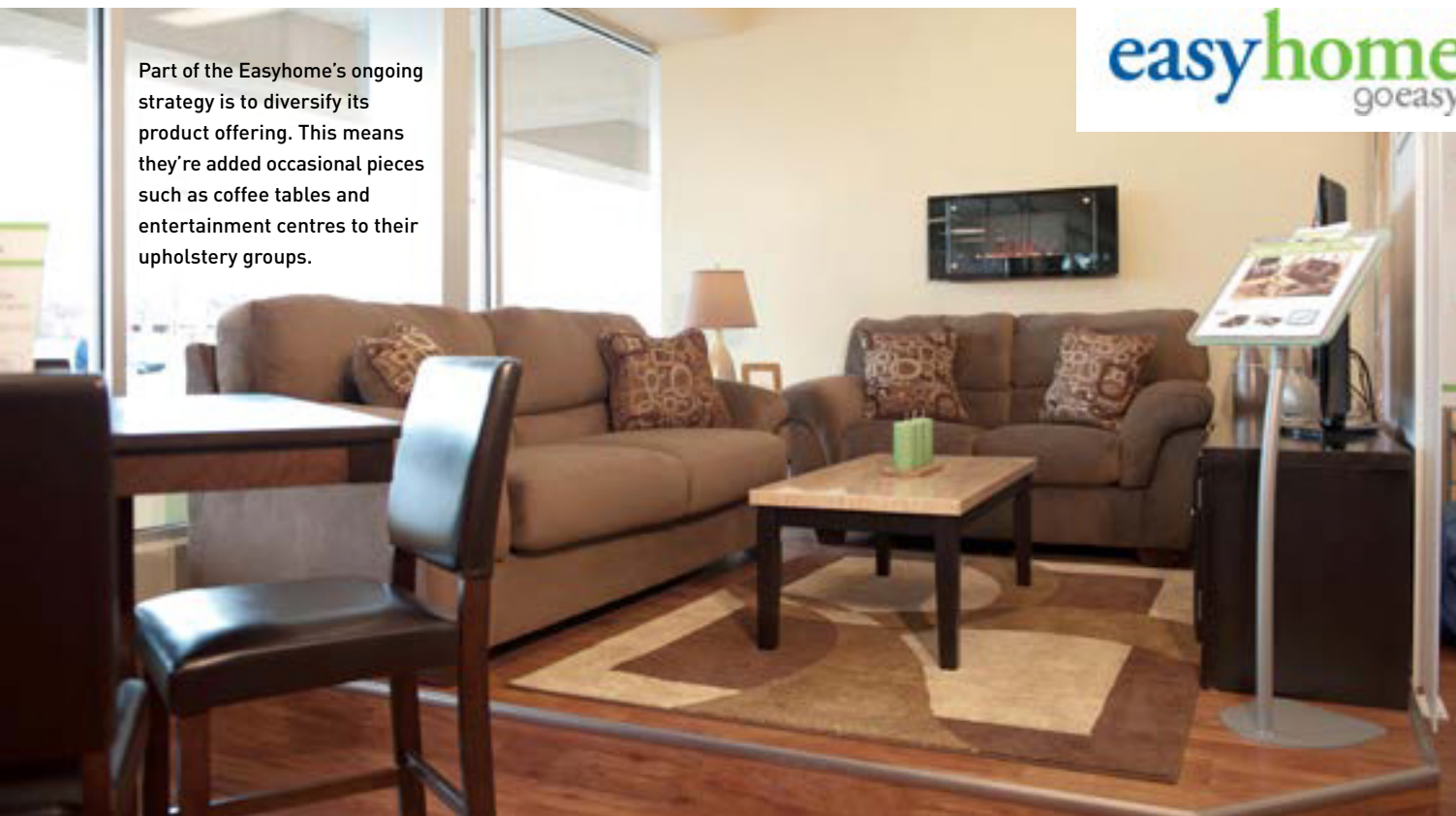
It's true Easyhome hasn't fared as well in recent years even though it remains this country's largest big-ticket leasing merchant. Until last year, when sales recorded a modest uptick, they had fallen in each of the past five years from \$158.3 million in 2014 to \$137.7 million in 2018.

Easyhome has also seen its store count drop from 192 in 2014 (the year after the company exited the merchandise leasing market in the United States) to 165 last year, made up of 134 corporate stores and 34 franchise locations across the country. Its monthly potential lease revenue also fell in 2018 – to \$9.1 million, down 3.6% from \$9.5 million the year before. ►



Part of the Easyhome's ongoing strategy is to diversify its product offering. This means they're added occasional pieces such as coffee tables and entertainment centres to their upholstery groups.

easyhome
goeasy



THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO GO

Steven Poole, GoEasy senior vice president of operations and merchandising, firmly believes Easyhome has bottomed out – or, as he put it, stabilised. But more importantly, he waxes enthusiastically about its future.

“My sole responsibility is Easyhome – to make sure Easyhome continues to thrive,” he told *Home Goods Online* in an interview. “And we’re coming off our best year in about ten years. And in the fourth quarter, our same store sales were up 7%.”

In recent years, the merchandising leasing segment has shrunk. The Texas-based and publicly-held Rent-A-Center abandoned its foray into the Canadian market to focus on its domestic market. Meanwhile, the other U.S. leasing powerhouse – Aaron’s – has fewer than 40 Canadian stores and doesn’t appear to be adding to its network.

Easyhome is the only truly national player in Canada’s big-ticket leasing market. Most of its competitors are regional in scope, such as Rental City in Ontario.

“The industry is not growing,” Poole points out.

He also admits Easyhome needed to shed its excess locations. “We were overstored, and we needed to consolidate,” he said. “We had over 200 stores at one point, but we haven’t closed a single store since the end of the first quarter.”



During the first three months of 2018, the company shed six stores. Poole firmly believes there’ll be no further shrinkage to the store count. It may be a while before any expansion will be entertained, but he says the company’s energy will now focus on improving performance. One way to do that is to tap into Easyfinancial’s success.

“The top of mind awareness for Easyfinancial is extremely high,” he points out. It’s one of the reasons why almost 100 Easyhome stores are now offering unsecured lending products. ▶

Easyhome operated some 164 stores across the country at the end of 2018. While the store count has fallen over the past few years, it’s now stable.



This bedroom group has proven itself a winner for Easyhome.

“The wonderful thing about leasing is the complete freedom to return the merchandise. Our customer loves that flexibility.”

“This expansion allowed us to further increase the distribution footprint of our financial services products by leveraging our existing real estate and employee base,” GoEasy said in a note to shareholders. “Offering lending at our Easyhome locations has enabled our stores to diversify their product offering and meet their customers broader financial needs.”

Easyhome also offers the consumer a host of other advantages, the greatest of which is flexibility. She doesn’t have to live with a mistake.

“The wonderful thing about leasing is the complete freedom to return the merchandise,” Poole says, noting if the consumer leases a 92-inch sofa, moves and discovers it doesn’t fit in her new home, she can send it back and replace it with one that does.

“Our customer loves that flexibility.”

This flexibility also extends to Easyhome’s product mix, which Poole notes is expanding into areas not normally associated with lease-to-own. For example, occasional furniture and accessories, such as sideboards, lamps, fireplaces and even mattresses. “We’re finding all of these have been very good for us,” Poole said. “So, we’re expanding into new categories.”

Then there’s electronics and appliances. Flat screen televisions remain a hot item for Easyhome – particularly the ones with screen sizes greater than 50 inches. Cell phones, such as the top-of-the-line models from Apple and Samsung are also popular with Easyhome’s customer base.

They are also getting more active online. “E-commerce is becoming really important to the lease-to-own piece,” Poole says.

At the end of the day, Easyhome remains an integral part of GoEasy’s business – even if it doesn’t get a lot of attention in the quarterly or annual reports and is largely ignored by the Bay Street types. It may not grow in the next few years at the same pace as Easyfinancial, but its importance shouldn’t be overlooked.

“We have a lot of confidence in its ability to perform,” Poole says. “It provides positive cash flow while giving a lot of stability to the overall business.” **HGO**

MICHAEL J. KNELL is the publisher and editor of Home Goods Online and all three of its platforms. He has observed and reported on Canada’s big ticket home goods industry for the past 30 years.

This dining room presentation features a variety of chairs, all designed to work with the table.

OPENINGS



Belleville HomeStore **ANOTHER STEP FORWARD FOR HEFT**

Opening their second Ashley HomeStore is another piece of the growth puzzle for the Upadhyay family, who started out in the industry as the owners of HEFT, an decorative accessory resource supplying both retailers and designers.

BY GREG SIMPSON



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THE WORLD'S LARGEST FURNITURE resource established a beachhead in the Eastern Ontario city of Belleville recently with the opening of its latest licenced store, a 13,000 square foot store that once housed one of the best Sears Home outlets. It's also the second Ashley HomeStore in the expanding business empire of Jay and Shelly Upadhyay.

The sales floor is warm and inviting, displaying more than immediately meets the eye. While the furniture is undoubtedly Ashley, many of the accessories complementing the vignettes of living rooms, dining rooms and bedroom are from the Upadhyay family's other business – HEFT Inc., a retailer and distributor of decorative accessories, lamps and area rugs based in Mississauga.

Walking into the Belleville store – located on a stand-alone pad at the north end of this city's Quinte Mall – one stops for a second to appreciate not only the size of the store, but the comfortable flow of the surroundings and availability of friendly staff. The floor features

Jay and Shelly Upadhyay are seen here in their recently opened Ashley HomeStore in Belleville, Ontario.



"This space is really big, and we have a lot of variety and a lot of choices. There is so much to choose from. Anyone entering the store won't leave saying they couldn't find anything."

Ashley Furniture's *Lifestyles* approach to merchandising furniture. While individual spaces showcase collections such as *Urbanology*, *Family Spaces*, and *Contemporary Living* are distinct, they blend well enough to make the wandering eye become a wandering foot. It doesn't take long to experience every piece in the store and begin a second walk-around.

During this round, the smaller details begin to present themselves. Accenting the Ashley furniture is a range of HEFT's accessories that draw out a vision of a real living space for the consumer. For example, an Edison vintage bulb in a Hanging Glass lamp can adorn a space above the Heritage Road lifestyle collection and suddenly the consumer can visualise the presentation in their own home. Over in *Urbanology*, a jute rug lies comfortably in front of an *Owensbe* two-piece sectional, tying the two together in a vignette where the contemporary finds the nostalgic.

HEFT – which has its own web site at heft-inc.com – carries an array of home goods. Their rug assortment comes in a selection of cotton, jute and wool; while their lighting includes vintage style LED bulbs, string lights and incandescent. It also offers fireplaces and decorative accessories in several styles. French Bistro tables and chairs are HEFT's primary furniture offerings, along with Adirondack chairs and table-in-a-bag products.

The Upadhyay's family company has evolved throughout its history. Beginning over 20 years ago in the engineering sector, HEFT (an acronym for Heat Exchange Fit Tube) grew to expand into wholesaling, and then manufacturing, accessories that were sold to furniture retailers. It also operates or holds an interest in factories in several countries – including Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia to name a few – and exports their product assortment to nearly every continent on the planet.

Belleville is also not the family's first brick-and-mortar-furniture store. For the past three years, the husband-and-wife team of Jay and Shelly Upadhyay have operated an Ashley HomeStore in Prescott, Ontario, a small community near the Quebec border. They also have a 55,000 square foot warehouse.

Becoming an Ashley HomeStore licensee simply made sense, the couple told *Home Goods Online*.

Ashley HomeStore is a division of the Arcadia, Wisconsin-based Ashley Furniture Industries, a full-line furniture manufacturer and distributor that covers almost all the important categories, including case goods and upholstery as well as outdoor and casual. ▶



The Urbanology section of the store. Urbanology is one of Ashley's best-selling furniture lifestyle collections.

Launched in 1997, the Ashley HomeStore network boasts some 800 stores in 45 different countries with approximately 60 or so across Canada. For the past decade, it has been ranked as the largest furniture retailer in the United States where its sales were estimated at US\$4.16 billion in 2017.

It also boasts an immediately identifiable brand – whose commercials are frequently seen on the most popular television networks – making it an easy bandwagon for the Upadhyay family to hop on.

“They offer all the assistance you need and offer a great product,” Jay Upadhyay said. “Lots of choices and the price point has something for everyone’s budget. It works for pretty much every house.”

When deciding on a location for their second store, the exit of Sears Canada from the market last January provided them with a great space at an attractive price. Belleville is a city of 50,000 people with a catchment area of about 100,000 creating a nice sized market for the Upadhyay’s Ashley Homestore.

The local competition includes a corporate The Brick store; a Leon’s Furniture franchise; a JYSK outlet; as well as a number of independent retailers.

“This is a nice booming town and we just heard so many good stories about Belleville,” Upadhyay told one local newspaper just prior to the store’s grand opening last September. “When we came here it was really very inviting.

“It’s so vibrant,” he continued. “You go into some other towns you will see small pockets where there is hustle and bustle. Here, just in this one kilometre there is 1,000 cars. And that’s every day.”

The store is licensed, meaning they commit to carrying Ashley’s product assortment, but they own and operate the store. But that doesn’t mean Ashley didn’t play a meaningful role in creating it.

Ashley provided expertise to get it and running and its designers arranged the store in such a way that visitors can find entire rooms ready to go, or just find individual pieces they can use add to their own home environment. ▶

Every room setting in the store is created to be easily translated into customer’s home.



This vignette is the first thing the customer sees when walking into the store, located in Belleville's Quinte Mall.



Shelly Upadhyay at work in the store. Most of the accessories sold in the store are from HEFT, a company the Upadhyay founded some 20 years ago.



"This space is really big, and we have a lot of variety and a lot of choices," Shelly Upadhyay said. "There is so much to choose from. Anyone entering the store won't leave saying they couldn't find anything."

And the ability to feature their own line of accessories made it a stellar fit for the owners of HEFT.

The Upadhyay family has ambitious plans for the next few years and hope to open as many as five more Ashley HomeStore locations, as well as independent stand-alone furniture store. While locations haven't been finalised, the Ontario cities of Peterborough and Trenton figure prominently in their thinking.

Bringing high quality furniture and accessories to smaller, but growing Ontario markets would appear to be a sound strategy. Economic growth in their targeted communities ranges from 1% to 3% annually and are becoming more popular with those who find the larger cities too expensive to live in.

Jay and Shelley Upadhyay are betting on that strategy. With some 20 years of HEFT progress, it seems a safe bet to make. **HGO**

GREG SIMPSON is a freelance writer and blogger living in Port Hope, Ontario. HGO publisher and editor Michael J. Knell contributed to this story.



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Training is critical. The retail market is changing faster than ever and keeping up with them in real time means having a dedication to learning. All of it is important whether it's product knowledge, business knowledge, healthy and safety or any other topic. Smart business owners ignore it at their own peril.

THE MANY FACES of TRAINING



BY DONALD
COOPER

THERE'S MUCH TALK IN BUSINESS today about the importance of initial and on-going training, coaching and employee development. And, there should be. Training, after all, is particularly vital for furniture, mattress and major appliance retailers, particularly when one considers the advancements in technology across all three product categories. I firmly believe, you can't grow your business without growing your people.

To truly embrace a program of ongoing employee education and development, keep in mind there are many of training. This column details a partial list in the paragraphs that follow. On a scale of one to ten – with ten being excellent – ask yourself how you are doing at each of these and which of these 11 types of training need improving in your business.

'Who we are' training. Learning the company's history, culture, values, standards, vision, commitments and achievements. This is most important for effectively on-boarding new employees, but it should be reinforced and updated on a regular basis.

'How we do business' training. Learning the company's systems, processes, terms, customer and internal policies.

'Product knowledge' training. Learning the features and benefits of what the store sells and the company's compelling value proposition. This would typically be for those in sales and marketing, but all employees should have an understanding of this as well. It's part of being proud of what the company does and their role in it.

'Skills and knowledge' training. How to do their current job more effectively and more safely and why their job is important to the rest of the team, to the customer and to the bottom line.



'Learning new stuff' training. Learning new technologies, machinery, processes, systems or policies as they're introduced.

'Growth and development' training. This occurs, normally, twice:

The first time is when preparing employees ahead of time for subsequent promotion or increased responsibility. This would include training in managing people, projects, processes and budgets.

The second time is when training and coaching employees after a promotion or addition of responsibility. No one should ever be promoted or transferred to a different responsibility without a specific training or coaching package. Otherwise, the employee in question is just being set up to fail.

'Health and Safety' and 'Emotionally Safe Workplace' training. If a business is not a physically and emotionally healthy and safe place to be, nothing else matters. Everyone on the team needs to be aware of, knowledgeable about and

constantly reminded of smart health and safety practices as well as the company's policies and commitment to creating and maintaining a safe workplace. And, team members must be encouraged to report any physically or emotionally unsafe practices or behaviour.

'Attitude adjustment' training. This is generally for employees who are exhibiting some kind of inappropriate or toxic behaviour. Topics could include diversity, bullying, gender respect, anger management or the importance of the company's standards of performance, appearance and behavior.

Ongoing communication. This best described as 'how we're doing and where we're going as a business' training. Explaining and reinforcing why each team member's particular job is important remains one of the most important aspects of employee engagement.

Training to do another job. Otherwise known as cross training, this creates a more flexible and ►



Select a few of your top front-line and front-line supervisory people and give them time to put together a one-hour or 90-minute session where they will give you their truth about what's going on.

efficient workforce and becomes even more important should a team member's current job is soon to become redundant.

Daily ongoing informal coaching should be provided for every team member on how to do any aspect of his or her job more effectively in a way that instructs, grows, encourages and engages each one to be more effective and to prepare him for more or different responsibilities.

THE OTHER KIND OF TRAINING

There's one other type of 'staff training' that is rarely talked about, especially by business owners and senior managers. That's the one where the team members are afforded the opportunity to 'train' top management about what's really going on in the company from their perspective.

This is best done by asking individuals at all levels of the organisation for their honest insight into such things as:

- 1** What does the business not do as well as it should? What's not working so well in the business and what do they suggest be done to fix it?
- 2** What frustrates them or prevents them from getting their job done effectively and what they suggest be done to fix it?
- 3** What frustrates or alienates the customers. Once again, what do they suggest be done to fix it?
- 4** What could be done to help make the team more excited to come to work each day?

A second approach to giving the team – especially those on the front-line – an opportunity to 'train' top management about what's really going on in the company from their perspective is ask them to put together and deliver a presentation on what they believe could be improved in the areas of the customer experience, employee safety, efficiency, communication, policies and processes, facilities and working conditions.

Select a few of your top front-line and front-line supervisory people and give them time to put together a one-hour or 90-minute session where they will give you their truth about what's going on. Do you have guts to give this one a try? You'll be amazed at what you learn and what needs fixing.

So, there you have it – the 11 faces of training and a gutsy bonus suggestion. How will you use these insights to improve your understanding of and commitment to training, learning and people development in your business? And, when will you start? **HGO**

A regular contributor to Home Goods Online, DONALD COOPER has been both a world-class manufacturer and an award-winning retailer. Now a Toronto-based business speaker and coach, he helps business owners and managers rethink, refocus and re-energise their business to create compelling customer value, clarity of purpose and long-term profitability. For more information, or to subscribe to his free, monthly management e-newsletter, go to www.donaldcooper.com

INDUSTRY CALENDAR

May 24, 2019

CHFA AWARDS GALA

Canadian Home Furnishings Alliance
Universal Event Space
Vaughan, ON
marcomweb.com/chfaevents

May 24 to 26, 2019

CANADIAN FURNITURE SHOW

Quebec Furniture Manufacturers Assn.
International Centre
Mississauga, ON
canadianfurnitureshow.com

May 28 to 29, 2019

STORE 2019

Retail Council of Canada
Toronto Congress Centre
Toronto
storeconference.ca

June 2 to 5, 2019

SHOWTIME

International Textile Marketing Assn.
High Point, NC
showtime-market.com

July 9 to 15, 2019

INTERNATIONAL GIFT & HOME FURNISHINGS MARKET

America's Mart
Atlanta, GA
americasmart.com

July 28 to August 1, 2019

LAS VEGAS MARKET

World Market Center
Las Vegas, NV
lasvegasmarket.com

August 11 to 14, 2019

TORONTO GIFT & HOME FAIR

Canadian Gift Assn.
Toronto Congress Centre
Mississauga, ON
cangift.org

August 15 to 18, 2019

TUPELO FURNITURE MARKET

Tupelo, Mississippi
tupelofurnituremarket.com

August 17 to 20, 2019

PRIMETIME

Cantrex Nationwide
New Orleans
nationwideprimetime.com

August 25 to 28, 2019

ALBERTA GIFT & HOME FAIR

Canadian Gift Assn.
Edmonton Expo Centre
Edmonton, AB
cangift.org

September 21 to 23, 2019

CANTREX PRIMETIME

Cantrex Nationwide
Shaw Centre/Westin Hotel
Ottawa
cantrexprimetime.ca

September 24, 2019

CHFA ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC

Canadian Home Furnishings Alliance
Caledon Woods Golf Club
Bolton, Ontario
chfaweb.ca

September 26 to 29, 2019

INTERIOR DESIGN SHOW VANCOUVER

Vancouver Convention Centre
(West Building)
vancouver.interiordesignshow.com

October 19 to 23, 2019

HIGH POINT MARKET

High Point, NC
highpointmarket.org

January 7 to 10, 2020

CES

Consumer Technology Association
Las Vegas Convention Center
Las Vegas, NV
ces.tech

January 13 to 19, 2020

IMM COLOGNE

The International Interiors Show
Koelnmesse GmbH
Cologne, Germany
imm-cologne.com

January 16 to 19, 2020

INTERIOR DESIGN SHOW

Metro Toronto Convention Centre South
Toronto
interiordesignshow.com

January 27 to 30, 2020

THE INTERNATIONAL SURFACE EVENT (TISE)

Mandalay Bay Convention Center
Las Vegas
intlurfaceevent.com

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T: 514.866.3631
canadianfurnitureshow.com

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Las Vegas Market

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lasvegasmarket.com

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