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Recognizing a Giant

BY HUGH PATERSON

Gordon Reid, one of Ottawa's most successful retail entrepreneurs, may be 76 but he still drops in on the competition and chats up their customers.

Corporate spying is too strong a word, but he's proud of the fact he's trying to glean any shred of information that might give his Giant Tiger Stores an edge.

That same kind of attention to customers' wishes has stood him in good stead for a long time, although the time has passed pretty quickly in his eyes.

It's been nearly 50 years since Reid founded Giant Tiger, and the company's CEO and chairman Wednesday was given a lifetime achievement award by the Retail Council of Canada, which he will receive at a dinner in Toronto May 31.

Reid founded the company with one Ottawa store in 1961. Today, the chain has 193 franchised stores across Canada with more than \$1 billion in annual sales employing more than 7,000.

Council president Diane Brisebois called Reid a "remarkable Canadian success." "Gordon is a man of vision who has forged a company with a family-based culture. His honesty, integrity and common-sense approach to business have gained the respect of employees, suppliers and other leaders in the business community."

Under Reid's leadership, Giant Tiger "has also become a community-minded organization that donates more than \$2 million annually to more than 700 local associations" in Canada, the council said.

To earn the award, a nominee must have served as an executive in the sector for at least 25 years.

"I'm obviously very pleased to be honoured like this," said Reid.

"Although it doesn't seem like it, it's been a long journey and to have people interested in that journey is wonderful."

His remembers vividly starting out in his first part-time job at the Robert Simpson Co. warehousing operations in Montreal, and then at 16 starting full-time in the men's furnishings department on Ste-Catherine Street. "That was quite something. Montreal was different then, and well-known people passing through would always come by."

Actually, starting full-time at 16 wasn't exactly his idea. He was expelled from school

in Verdun "for misbehaving, setting a bad example, something that was quite small," and then he went looking to make a living.

Most of his success with Giant Tiger he attributes to franchising his stores.

'People who were employees can now have their own franchises with us, and be part of the communities.'

GORDON REID,
Giant Tiger founder

"I was very lucky with that. It was a great way to get experienced people. Over the years we had a lot come from Woolworth, Kresge, K-Mart and later Zellers.

"We learned from their skills."

That trend has continued. Reid says he now has more than 20 former Wal-Mart employees running his franchises.

"It's unusual in that people who were employees can now have their own franchises



PHOTOGRAPH BY: PAT MCGRATH, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Gordon Reid, chairman and founder of Giant Tiger stores, will receive a lifetime achievement award from the Retail Council of Canada at the end of the month.

with us, and be part of the communities. In many cases, they can even go back to their home towns. In many communities, these people could run for mayor and be elected."

Reid still goes to work six days a week, and certainly spends time on his own retail floors talking to customers. But he lets his new president, long-time employee Andy Gross, do most of the work.

He's also proud of his company's information technology systems, developed by Mike Lewis, and the transportation and warehousing that have evolved.

"If a store orders something in the evening, it will be at the doorstep in the morning."

Recent winners of the lifetime achievement award include Réjean Dionne of ALDO Groupe, Water Hachborn of Home Hardware Stores, Herschel Segal of Le Chateau Inc., Richard Currie of Loblaw Cos., Thomas and Sonja Bata of Bata Shoe Organization and Harry Rosen of Harry Rosen Inc.

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