

The Savvy of Mac Van Wielingen

Keeping the focus on the long term
and on people

BY JOHN HARDY

This is the 22nd anniversary for the Haskayne School of Business at the University of Calgary together with the Calgary Chamber to recognize outstanding leaders in the Calgary business community while honouring exceptional demonstrations of vision and leadership, sound business sense and a commitment to the community – with the Distinguished Business Leader Award.

The 2014 recipient is Mac Van Wielingen, chairman and co-founder of Calgary-based ARC Financial and ARC Resources.

“He is really one of the most respected business leaders in Calgary,” says the Chamber CEO, Adam Legge, “and he has always been supportive of what the Chamber stands for. Mac Van Wielingen has a genuine focus about ethical business leadership practices and a strong conscience about profits.”

Business in Calgary spent time with Van Wielingen, who shared some of his insightful thoughts about the Calgary, Canadian and global economies, the roller-coaster that is Canada’s energy sector and about the “new normal” in various aspects of contemporary business.

Mac Van Wielingen, recipient of the 2014 Distinguished Business Leader Award. Photo by Ewan Nicholson Photography.

Mac Van Wielingen is a consummate workaholic – with a significant difference.

Like many (self-confessed or in-denial) workaholics, Van Wielingen is focused, often intense, ferociously knowledgeable and always thinking. He is an accomplished listener and an engaging talker with a genuine and uncompromising interest in everyone and everything that touches his hectic but well-organized days.

But it’s not so much about work.

Officially and unofficially he is retired from the day-to-day demands, decisions and responsibilities of ARC Financial, Canada’s leading energy-focused private equity investor, and ARC Resources, a leading oil and gas company focused on resource plays and which has one of the strongest balance sheets in the energy sector.

So Van Wielingen’s ongoing workaholism is not so much



A lively discussion on advanced leadership in diverse fields. (L-R): David Lertzman, assistant professor of environmental management and sustainable development; Jenny Krahn, director of the Canadian Centre for Advanced Leadership in Business; Mac Van Wielingen, chairman of ARC Financial Corp. and chairman of ARC Resources Ltd.; and Piers Steel, professor and distinguished research chair in advanced business leadership at the Canadian Centre for Advanced Leadership in Business. Photo by Ewan Nicholson Photography.

He prioritizes staying contemporary and connecting with the next generation of business leaders, especially his deep commitment and involvement with the Haskayne Business School faculty and students. And most importantly, his fierce pride and passion for family – his spouse, Susan, their three grown children and particularly his two young grandchildren and what kind of a world is being left for them.



Mac and his wife Susan enjoying quality time with their grandchildren.

about dealing with day-to-day ARC issues as much as it is about anything and everything, business – business in general and business specifics; business trending and performance; tracking and projecting the mood swings of the economy; the global markets; and the constant flux of business strategy.

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At 60, and especially compared with his senior management and financial sector peers, Van Weilingen is relatively young to have achieved such high levels of professional success and a widely-respected, rock-solid reputation for exceptional business savvy.

The outspoken, personable and proudly Calgary-born and still Calgary-based chairman and co-founder (and retired head) of ARC Financial and ARC Resources is consistently upbeat and positive and, at the moment, encouraged by the current business climate.



Van Wielingen has no set schedule at Haskayne, but is considered an adjunct professor – an honorary faculty position. Photo by Ewan Nicholson Photography.

“All things considered, we’re in good shape,” he nods with a slight shrug and a grin. “The overall business environment feels far more stable. The global economy, the Canadian, U.S. and even Europe seem to be on relatively sound footing.

“The American business meltdown was extremely serious and so disillusioning. It was such a loss of confidence and a dark, difficult time,” he says with a sombre tone. “It left a mark. There’s no getting away from the modern reality that, no matter what else is happening, business and the world economy can’t move forward if the U.S. is in trouble.

“But I’m feeling significantly more comfortable these days, especially about the U.S. recovery and their steady growth. In fact, the American economy is showing just how very resilient it really is. And that’s very encouraging to see. Certainly in Canada and even globally, there is a noticeable sense of comfort and confidence in the overall economic

network,” says the savvy and upbeat Van Weilingen.

Although he reflects back with satisfaction, pride and just a few hindsight regrets about the bold and ambitious early ARC years, 25 years later the company he co-founded continues with solid growth and as a remarkable success story in the global energy field.

Today, ARC Financial Corp. is a bigger, bolder and internationally respected private equity management firm with an exclusive focus on the energy industry. Van Wielingen is slightly sentimental, recalling building ARC with primarily industry-leading investment research abilities that he and his senior management team leveraged to build a highly successful corporate advisory practice. He remembers that they also began to invest as principals and with partners in the equity of early-stage energy companies and ambitiously acquired oil and gas production assets.

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~ Jim Dewald



Jim Dewald, dean of the Haskayne School of Business.
Photo by Ewan Nicholson Photography.

The evolution of its production acquisition business led to the founding of ARC Resources Ltd. in 1996 and the TSX-listed company (ARX) has become one of the leading players in the Canadian oil and gas sector.

The retired boss (but by his own amused admission, still a very involved and active chairman) explains that, “ARC’s investment, research, corporate advisory and equity investment businesses evolved into an exclusive focus on private equity investing with the launch of our first fund in 1997.

“We have since raised six additional private equity funds and all together the seven ARC Energy Funds represent \$3.7 billion of committed capital. Our investors are largely institutional, comprised primarily of endowments, family offices, pension funds and foundations from Canada, the U.S. and Europe.

“The mandate for ARC Energy Funds is to provide growth equity capital for energy companies with a core focus on the Canadian oil and gas industry. The heart and soul of our

vision and strategy remains the same as it was 25 years ago,” he points out with a sense of pride and a gratified smile. “The business and the industry always have ups and downs. But we stay focused on long-term facts and fundamentals.”

Too savvy to divulge inside strategies (“besides, I’m retired”) he chuckles and does confide that after 25 years of success and growth, ARC’s main priorities remain focus on the long term and on people.

“Not only is our corporate culture based on solid values and quality relationships within our company but it is also the key to our long-term partnerships and relationships within our portfolio companies, our investors, our service providers and the communities in which we invest.”

Despite his riveted attention on the specifics, generalities, trends and idiosyncrasies of contemporary business that have him hooked, it is respect, loyalty, a grasp of reality, uncompromised values and infectious positivity that are key aspects of Van Wielingen’s private and professional relationships.

The intense business permafrost thaws a bit when he mentions his spouse, Susan, and their shared enjoyment of travelling in Europe, their three grown children, family vacations or getaways to Invermere, the Palm Desert or recently to Hawaii. “I absolutely adore my two grandchildren and I love being together with them.”

According to Jim Dewald, the affable and gung-ho dean of the Haskayne School of Business, “His mind is always working, usually about how things could be better. He’s a strong family man with an exceptional sense of balance. He loves positive energy and he’s all smiles!”

Although Van Wielingen has no set schedule at Haskayne, he is considered an adjunct professor – an honorary faculty position.

A key part of the Calgary business icon's positivity and supercharged outlook is staying relevant and contemporary – not only about challenging business aspects but about the technical and supply sides of the energy industry.

“With his depth of knowledge, tremendous business experience and his expertise, it is an invaluable and special opportunity for us, as academics, to have him as a member of Haskayne,” Dewald says, with enthusiasm. “He is extremely plugged-in, interested and involved. He usually attends full faculty events and really gets to know our faculty. He maintains a good understanding for whatever is going on and he insists on being directly accessible to our faculty at all times.”

Van Wielingen often delivers Haskayne classroom presentations. Dewald explains that with his business acumen, versatility and personal interest in various areas of business and management, the Calgary executive usually gets asked to talk about one of the current business school hot topics not only at Haskayne but in business schools around the world: ethical leadership and the role of ethical leadership in management.

“Although leadership is a fairly new but vital business topic and Van Wielingen has been in business for more than three decades,” Dewald observes, “it’s one of the secrets of the man’s success. On the topic of leadership in management and many other things, Mac Van Wielingen continues to be ahead of his time.”

Standing at the front of a Haskayne classroom, he is both revved and from the heart when speaks about business and what it takes to achieve success.

“The best possible advice for entrepreneurial leaders is: ‘build your company to adapt and last.’ With all the changes we have gone through and are still going through, a lot of us have learned the importance of being adaptable and resilient. I call it strategic optionality: the need to be financed so you have the shock absorber capacity that, when you get hit, you’re not out of the game.

“Also, the importance of developing strength of culture. When we started ARC, we wanted great results and great fulfilment and we were not prepared to compromise on fulfilment for the sake of results. I am convinced that the approach is still valid. To have a true sense of fulfilment, you move ahead, get great results, success and build great relationships. That’s what it’s all about.”

A key part of the Calgary business icon’s positivity and

supercharged outlook is, despite 30 years of success and earning an impressive reputation, staying relevant and contemporary – not only about challenging business aspects but about the technical and supply sides of the energy industry.

“I am more and more encouraged by the impact of technology in the energy sector,” he says with genuine excitement. “There are so many extraordinary advancements, like horizontal drilling. And I am convinced that it’s a long march of progress when it comes to renewable energy. I’m challenging us to think deeper about what is and is not renewable. For example, I’m bullish about the present and the long-term future of natural gas.

“Granted, there are uncertainties we have never seen before,” he warns. “Notably the inability to expand and access key markets because of infrastructure constraints. Alberta needs west coast access to Asian markets. Without infrastructure expansion and access to new markets like China and Japan, the western Canadian oil and gas sector could become the backwater of the North American energy industry.”

Van Wielingen is a confident, decisive forward thinker who rarely looks back. But with just a hint of introspection and sentiment, he does have a regret.

“I feel extremely fortunate with my life, my career and my circumstances but when I think back to what I used to rant and rave about, years ago, it feels strangely humbling. I look back and realize that my views were incomplete and shallow. I can’t believe I argued some of those things. The result is that I now feel more inspired to think more deeply, look for more insight, academic research and evidence-based understanding and not just that arm-waving stuff.”

Maybe it’s his hectic, “unofficially retired” schedule that takes him from chair duties with ARC, looking after the good work of his family foundation, what he calls “the full commitment and serious responsibility” of serving on several Calgary boards. Or maybe it’s a side-effect of dealing with Haskayne students and faculty or how he intently listens to people and the insatiable way he absorbs facts and information that keeps Van Wielingen relevant and up to date.

“I still feel I have a lot of exciting challenges in my life.” **BIC**