

Business *in Calgary*



The **Entrepreneur** Issue

Calgary business icon and former Canadian Entrepreneur of the Year David Werklund



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The Entrepreneur Issue

Calgary business icon and former Canadian Entrepreneur of the Year David Werklund wants to inspire a new generation of leaders

BY DEREK SANKEY



David Werklund. Photo by Chad Shire.

As a young fellow, David Werklund remembers very well his memories of working on the family farm where he was born and raised in the northern Alberta town of Valleyview. When his father passed away at the age of 17, he put his strong work ethic and independent attitude into action. He left high school to go work in the oilfields on drilling and service rigs, applying the skills and principles of hard work he learned from his early years on the farm.

“My journey was to go find a job, leave the farm and go out and work,” says Werklund in his practical, calm and thoughtful manner. He worked for Shell Canada from 1965-71 before his entrepreneurial drive led him to start an oilfield maintenance company called Concord Well Services in 1979 with one service rig and a small group of employees. As the company grew, so did his desire to take on a new adventure in entrepreneurship.

He founded Canadian Crude Separators – the predecessor to today’s industry giant CCS Corp. – in 1984 to fulfill his entrepreneurial fire to create. “That’s what entrepreneurs do,” he says bluntly. “They see an opportunity and they go for it. It just happened to be an opportunity that I understood and I went for it.” It quickly became apparent that he was on to something. “There turned out to be a lot bigger demand than I had expected,” he says.

He continually broadened the scope of services and the service model itself over the year at CCS, retaining its core purpose but growing the company into a \$4-billion enterprise employ-

ing 3,000 people. In 2006, he founded Werklund Capital as he began what would be a transition out of the day-to-day operations of CCS. The private equity firm, which specializes in mid-market companies and has about \$2.5 billion under management through a mezzanine financing group, includes a public equities portfolio and an enterprise group that oversees operations within the portfolio companies and introduces best practice management systems.

Last year, he stepped down as president and CEO of CCS to focus more of his efforts on his new venture and to allow John Gibson – an industry veteran with more than 25 years of experience – to take on his previous role. “Handing the reigns over to Mr. Gibson, I decided I needed a break from running a huge empire (and) it added some bench strength to the company, broadened its experience ... and the ability to grow the company,” says Werklund, who remains chairman of the CCS board.

David Werklund, Founder of Werklund Capital

- Born in Valleyview, Alberta, David Werklund left his family farm at a young age to work in the oilfields on drilling and service rigs before finishing high school
- Worked for Shell from 1965-71
- Founded Concord Well Services in 1979
- Founded Canadian Crude Separators (known today as CCS Corp.) in 1984 and grew it into a \$4-billion energy and environmental waste services enterprise that employs about 3000 people
- In 2006, he founded Werklund Capital, a private equity firm specializing in mid-market companies, and the firm now has \$2.5 billion under management in energy, aviation, telecommunications, transportation and other ventures
- Around the same time, he partnered with the Werklund Foundation to fulfill his lifelong commitment to supporting youth and communities through philanthropy and education



Photo by Chad Shire.

Werklund Capital's biggest stake is still with CCS, but he has expanded the firm's focus to include a 50 per cent stake in Avmax, an aviation support and management company – one of the fastest-growing entities in his portfolio growing ten-fold in three and a half years – and branched out into other areas. The firm is invested in Barrett Explore Inc. through its telecommunications brand XploreNet of broadband and high-speed 4G network serving rural locations. Werklund Capital also has a stake in transportation through Phoenix Oilfield Hauling, where he serves as chairman and has been a director since 2006.

Through it all, he's learned a lot about leadership. "I like to believe that my leadership style is empowering," says Werklund. "I believe that through truly empowering people – empowerment, by the way, without discipline, guidance and structure is chaos – is also a choice by the individual that they have to be open to learning and experiencing what

they need to do to improve or change their ways."

Thinking back to his roots on the family farm, he also feels a strong connection to the land and a responsibility to find new environmental solutions to the challenges facing the industry as a whole. "Environmental solutions is very much a passion of mine," he explains. "My commitment to this day – and always has been – is that we need to protect the air we breathe, the ground we walk on and the water we drink."

One of the biggest feathers in his cap came in 2005 when he won the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award for all of Canada, going on to the firm's world stage competition representing the country in Monaco that same year. This kind of recognition doesn't just land in your lap; it's the result of having the vision and determination to persevere through any challenge.

When he looks at the volatility of the current economic environment and the recession in 2008-09, he demonstrates



Deanna Werklund, president of the Werklund Foundation, is leading the charge to develop a world-class leadership program for youth with the support of her father, David Werklund.

that same kind of entrepreneurial drive that has been a trademark of his career. “It’s very turbulent times, our countries have overleveraged the debt and are in danger of defaulting their commitments, therefore I think there’s a lot of nervousness that I personally think will continue for some time,” Werklund says. “I think we’ll have to find and look for those opportunities in turbulent times, of which there are many. It’s pretty bad out there, but for ourselves, we’ve been able to manage through it in 2008 very, very well and progressed in our financial management group.”

One of the most important elements of Werklund’s career has been to find meaningful ways to support and give back to the community. Around the same time he started Werklund Capital, he partnered with his daughter, Deanna Werklund, to launch the Werklund Foundation.

Deanna incorporated the foundation in 2006 with a broad mandate around education. “We knew we wanted to focus on education as a whole – not just formal education, but developmental education,” she says. After taking an executive development program called Leader One through a U.S. company, Rapport Leadership, her foundation began to find its calling.

“Nothing quite hit what this program did,” she says. “They put you through these experiential processes that create these ah-ha awareness moments.” After learning that the



Photo by Chad Shire.

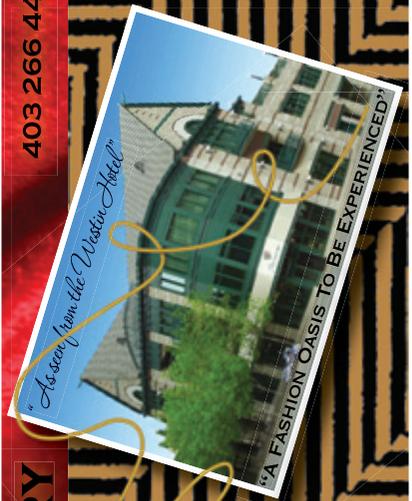
company offered a teen version of the program, she immediately explored it and hit the ground running with this idea to develop a youth leadership program with very real impact.

“It was a big dream of mine to take a program and put it into the education system,” she says. Deanna’s father fully supported her as she started offering the program in Calgary and she embarked on an in-depth research collaboration with the University of Calgary, which

eventually turned into a proposal for a youth leadership centre on campus. Deanna is working closely with the university and a \$3-million gift to the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Education has created a partnership to launch the Werklund Foundation Centre for Youth Leadership Education, which is set to formally open by the end of the year on the main floor of the Education Tower. It’s meant to develop and support research, teaching and

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~ David Werklund

community service activities focused on leadership training for teachers and youth.

Deanna bought the rights to the Rapport Leadership youth program for all of Canada so she could re-brand it and modify it based on the research done with the U of C. “That was a game-changer because the demand was getting really high for the program,” she says. Called ‘Empowering Minds,’ it includes three programs: Teen Leadership Breakthrough in collaboration with the university; Leadership Launch for junior high school students; and Legacy – a two-and-a-half day follow-up program to Teen Leadership Breakthrough.

“The results of the program are amazing,” she says. “It’s as extreme as preventing suicide and as simple as helping these young people find their way, build their confidence (and) their self esteem. What comes out of it is great leadership. They go out into their lives and make decisions that inspire others.” Dr. Shirley Steinberg heads up the Werklund Foundation Centre for Youth Leadership and lends her extensive expertise and research into youth leadership as the initiative gets ready to move to a new level.

David describes it as a “life-altering experience” for the youth that go through the program – one of the reasons he supports it so strongly and has given his daughter, Deanna, such latitude to run with it. “It’s so compelling,” says David. “The foundation has become a very inspirational part of being able to give back to our community in a way that’s so impactful.” At graduation ceremonies he attends for the foundation, he routinely has parents come up to him and tell him how the program has changed their son’s or daughter’s life – completely turned it around.

Family has always been another important part of his life throughout his career. The couple’s entire family lives in Calgary, including sons Mark Werklund and Maxwell Werklund, along with two grandchildren who all like to get away from the city rush out to their cabin in the Shushwap area.

When Deanna thinks about the link between family, community and business, a lot of it comes down to finding, creating and pursuing opportunities for everybody – at all levels – to improve their lives through leadership and reflection. “This program really gives them the power to look inside ... and focus in and let some of that noise go,” she says. “All of a sudden, these opportunities that are out there for young people become attended become appealing to the masses of our students.”

From high-achieving students on track to succeed to the “diamonds in the rough” that face challenges in attaining their potential, the program is open to youth from all walks of life. The end goal is the same, however each individual decides to pursue it, and that is confidence and the belief in themselves to pursue and achieve their dreams. Leadership is one invaluable tool to get there.

“Leadership, to me, is about leading by example,” says Deanna. “It’s not about being everybody’s boss and always being the one that thinks up the ideas.

David, meanwhile, still has that entrepreneurial drive and has no plans to retire, at least not in the traditional sense. “I don’t think I’m the retiring type,” he says, adding with a chuckle: “I wouldn’t look very good on the beach.” While he has handed over the reigns to Gibson at CCS, it doesn’t mean he’s not on the hunt for the next prospect. “It frees me up to do what I do best and look for those opportunities as an entrepreneur – to keep my eyes open,” he says.

As for his advice to young, aspiring entrepreneurs and business people? “My best piece of advice is to be fully committed to personal development in leadership and management skills – the continuous learning, self-awareness. It’s a lifelong journey,” says David. “They have to be humble enough to get true feedback from their people.”

There are always challenges around the corner, but a truly successful entrepreneur is never afraid to tackle them head on – and persevere through them. It’s not always an easy life, but it’s one that is worth it because it fulfills that drive and passion entrepreneurs have to make their vision a reality. “It’s been quite a challenging, but rewarding journey,” says David. **BIC**