



Born Into the Biz

Greg Hamre, with his mother and brother on his team, has become one of the brightest stars in Ontario

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Photography by
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Greg Hamre grew up immersed in the world of real estate. His mother, Shirley Hamre, entered the industry in 1980 and built her personal brand on the strength of her reputation and a network of community contacts she'd developed through many years of volunteer work with her church. She joined RE/MAX in 1991 and became one of the top agents in Ottawa and the country. Shirley worked hard. She found success. And Greg had a front-row seat.

"We ran out of room in the house for all of her trophies and plaques," Greg says of his mother. "She loves dealing with people. She loves making sure that people find the right home, the right lifestyle and the right neighborhood setting. She really cares."

That genuine connection with people, and the community, is one of the most important

lessons Greg learned from his mother. But an open heart and a way with people aren't enough. Successful professionals need to look the part as well. Greg says his mother "always looks like a million bucks" and, now that they're in the business, she expects Greg, and his brother Steve, to create the right impression too.

"You'll see me with a suit on at early-morning hockey practice, because when you're in your neighborhood and you're not looking like a Realtor, people start thinking maybe you aren't working or maybe things aren't good," Greg says. "I learned that from her: You dress for success every day."

It sounds like the perfect education for a

The Hamre Team
- Steve (left),
mother Shirley and
Team Leader Greg
- is a major force
in Ottawa. The
Associates with
RE/MAX Metro-
City Realty are
a fixture in
the Canadian
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team leader like Greg. He's a RE/MAX Lifetime Achievement Award recipient whose team has made the Chairman's Club for the past three years. But Greg's path to real estate was not a direct one. He always admired his mother as a natural salesperson and pioneer, but Greg saw his own future in business, where he could apply his marketing degree and his talent for strategic and creative thinking.

"I've always been very proud of my mom, but I never thought I would get into real estate," Greg says.

That changed when his father, Ross Hamre, died unexpectedly. It was a pivotal moment that would eventually draw the entire family into the business.

Change of Plans

After graduation, Greg moved to Toronto, where he started a family and launched a successful career as a marketing manager with RCA Canada – called Thompson Consumer Electronics at the time. His career mirrored his father's, an electronics sales manager who

helped bring the Panasonic brand to Canada.

"When my dad passed away it was a big turning point in all of our lives. We didn't expect it; my mom was having some difficulty and I decided to resign and help her," Greg says.

Ross' death, following a kidney infection, was a huge blow to the tight-knit family. "He was the glue that held everyone together," says Greg's brother, Steve. "My mom had built this huge empire, and it would have been a shame to see it go."

"Greg said 'Mom, we're coming home.' He came back with his two children and his wife and he got into the business with me," Shirley says.

The circumstances were unfortunate but the timing was good. Greg's former employer hit some hard times, while real estate began its long boom, even in a relatively conservative market like Ottawa. At the time, though,



Greg Hamre's work ethic and productivity help him create down time as well.

"My mother has constantly looked for better ways of doing things; we're always trying to raise the bar."

Greg was leaping into the unknown.

"I came into real estate on September 11, 2001. The towers were falling down. That was my first day. And I was like 'Oh my gosh. Here we go,'" he says.

Steve joined the family business three years later, leaving his own marketing career with a database company in Ottawa's high-tech sector. He and Greg became partners in 2008.

As the mother, Shirley felt it was important to take a step back and allow her sons to bring their own talents to the business. That hands-off approach extends to her unofficial title at work.

"They call me 'Shirley' at the office," she says. "Sometimes I'd just like to be 'Mom,' but it's the way they want it, and that's fine."

New Direction

"My mother built the family name in real estate by constantly looking for better ways of doing things," Greg says. "That mindset continues, and we're always trying to raise the bar."

That meant taking the technologies and business strategies that had been key to Greg's success in Toronto

and applying them to the real estate market in Ottawa. The approach is simple: Know your business, understand your customer's expectations, use technology to deliver your message at low cost and get the right kind of exposure. It's an approach that matched the marketing philosophy he found at RE/MAX.

"In some respects, I'm successful because I'm with RE/MAX," Greg says. "RE/MAX University is excellent, the technology is great and I never miss a chance to get together with RE/MAX people. We teach each other a lot – not just about real estate, but about business trends and many other things."

His affiliation with the most successful brand in real estate gives him the edge in a competitive market that is being split down the center. "There's no middle style agent anymore," Greg says. "There's a discount agent and there's a high-quality service agent. The agent in the middle is disappearing, because people either want to try it on their own or they realize they want good professional help."

Clients are smart, and they know what they want. For Greg, "good" customer service isn't enough. The experience has to be "magical."

"Every one of our listings looks like a model home. Staging is important to us. We understand that you have to pay attention to detail," Greg says.

That attention to detail has paid off, and the Hamre Team has the highest average sales price among the top 10 Realtors in Ottawa. Repeat customers and a strong referral network are essential to the team, and technology is key as well.

"I spend 30 minutes every morning looking at my website. My customers are looking at it every day. Why wouldn't I?" Greg says. "When someone lists with us they should have 1,000 eyeballs looking at their listing within the first 48 hours."

It isn't hard to see why the Hamre website – www.weknowottawa.com – attracts traffic. Videos and original blog posts boost the site's Google ranking, while embedded maps detail schools, restaurants and parks from the surrounding neighborhood. Web traffic data is an invaluable tool, Greg says.

"When I have a house for sale and I'm sitting in front of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, I want to be able to tell them what the heartbeat is on their listing. I can tell them day-by-day if their listing has a heartbeat or has flatlined," Greg says.

When it comes to marketing philosophy, Greg mentions a recent talk at the RE/MAX Canadian Conference. Ken Schmidt, a former communications director with Harley Davidson, advised attendees to never do what is expected, and to make themselves as noticeably different as possible.

"I was just sitting there at the edge of my seat saying 'This is exactly the way we are.' We don't follow. We like to cut the course ourselves," Greg says.

That approach, and his willingness to share his insights, has made Greg a popular convention speaker in his own right. But that success hasn't gone to his head. "I want other people to be successful too," he says. "RE/MAX gives us the tools. We just have to make them work. You can't be lazy in this business. Everything is there, and more."

Home Team

It might be a family operation, but it's a business first, Greg says.

Greg and Steve were very close growing up, and maintaining a business focus while working with family has not been a challenge.

"My brother and I are pretty competitive with each other. That helps, for sure," Steve says. "The customer comes first, but we know who gets the most deals on the board per month."

Shirley says she's always encouraged her kids to set and achieve goals.

"I think you have to be goal-oriented in life. When the children were young I used to set goals for them. I would say 'If we achieve these goals, then we're going to do this.' So they would be out delivering fliers for me," she says.

Greg agrees that real estate takes a full commitment.

"It's not my hobby. It's not my honeymoon. It's my job and my career," he says.

When Greg isn't working, you'll likely find him near the water or on a boat, and probably at the helm of that boat. He recently earned his Class Four sailing license, achieving near perfect scores on all three of his exams. Greg shares his passion for boating with the whole clan. In fact, Shirley, Greg, Steve and their families spend much of their downtime together.

"When we're relaxing away from work, it's a dining room table, not a boardroom table. That is so important. You have to be able to switch it off," Greg says.

And, yes, at the dining room table, Shirley goes by another name. Mom. 🍷

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