



ALL IN THE FAMILY

Business families are one of the most important, yet often misunderstood, segments of our economy.

by **Randall Mang** / illustration by **Leif Parsons**

A movement is growing to support Canada's business families. Should we care if they succeed? A contingent of Canadian academics and other concerned groups believes the answer is yes. Why? Because it's in all of our best interests.

According to the [Canadian Association of Family Enterprise \(CAFE\)](#), family-run businesses are responsible for some 50 per cent of all new jobs. Professor Lloyd Steier of the Alberta Business Family Institute at the University of Alberta says that business families account for between 80 and 90 per cent of our nation's firms, and research suggests they often outperform non-family competitors. And we're not just talking about ubiquitous mom-and-pop shops; household corporate names such as Bombardier, McCain, Molson, Rogers and Shaw hint at the magnitude and reach of Canadian business families in our society.

Canadian businessman Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien says business families are one of the most important, yet often misunderstood, segments of our economy. "They tend to be closer to their customers and their employees and the communities in which they work. They contribute time, money and personality."

de Gaspé Beaubien speaks from experience. In 1968, he and his wife, Nan-b, created Montreal-based [Telemedia Inc.](#), a privately held enterprise that they built into a media and communications empire and eventually passed on to their three children. Along the way, Philippe and Nan-b have lived and breathed the challenges of running a family company, and have advanced the cause of business families worldwide.

Over the past few years, their [Business Families Foundation](#) has convinced the University of British Columbia, the University of Alberta, the University of Western Ontario, École des Hautes Études Commerciales in Montreal, and the Memorial University of Newfoundland to open centres dedicated to business-family outreach. "It took 10 years to get them going," says Nan-b. "Now there are chairs, professorships and others organizing research, and the schools are providing courses. The change is very positive."

The timing couldn't be more crucial, says Lawrence Barns, the CEO of CAFE, the nationwide group (headquartered in Oakville, Ont.) that for 25 years has worked with universities, advisers and others to provide guidance and peer support to business families.

