



# Steward for Success

Old Town's **Jim Page** is driven to succeed. For the past 13 years, the unassuming leader has rolled up his sleeves and gotten down to business, guiding his family's company beyond the Maine border. BY NANCY GARLAND

**J**im Page hates neckties. The Aroostook County native eschews formality whenever possible, belying his stature as chief executive officer and part owner of the 130-year-old James W. Sewall Company. "It's a roll-up-your-sleeves environment," Page says. "When we work on a backcountry forestry plan, there is no need for starched shirts and cuff links."

The Sewall Company bustles with brainpower and energy, leaving little time for stuffy executive protocol as Page and his staff work to solve complex problems for an expanding client base. "We provide consulting services to a number of industries, but we specialize in those that engage with the land, with natural resources, energy, and the environment," Page says.

Building on its roots in forestry and surveying, Sewall's foresters, engineers, and mapping experts assist their clients in such diverse areas as providing inventory and appraisal services to support some of the largest national forestland transactions in the country, and engineering services to the emerging renewable energy market, as well as developing web-based computer applications for managing massive amounts of spatial data for utility industries.

"I am surrounded by great people," says Page. "If I'm doing my job, I'm providing a forum where good ideas can move forward. I want staff members to push me so the best ideas can progress, and the best ideas are rarely mine, frankly."

Despite his modesty, Page, 57, knows his company, and over the past decade has increased profits significantly.

"He is one of the brightest thinkers I've

ever met," says U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, who has known Page since their childhood days in Caribou. With a doctorate in the philosophical foundations of mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Page's background isn't typical for a CEO, but his uncle Joseph Sewall, who was CEO of the company for 50 years, knew Page could lead the company into the future when he hired him in 1997.

"Jim [Page] is a workaholic who doesn't seem to suffer for it," says Bob Ziegelaar, a Sewall board member. "Jim seems to have a wide variety of interests, ranging from business and scientific subjects to the environment and the arts. Given the diversified nature of the company, that is probably the right type of persona for the job."

Steeped in a tradition that began with its founders, brothers James and Joseph Sewall, in 1880, the company built a solid reputation working in the lumber industry in Maine and Canada. The family model worked well for more than 100 years, but today's professionals are eager to participate in how a company functions and grows in a much more direct way.

The Sewall Company now competes internationally for work in high-tech niche markets, including forest economics, geospatial application development, and renewable energy such as wind power and biomass. The company has nine offices in seven states, and last year had crews working along the Atlantic seaboard, in Central and South America, and Australia.

Like most businesses, Sewall has been affected by the current economic downturn. "We had significant layoffs, some of

which are now returning," Page says. About 120 staff members work out of the Old Town office, and about two dozen in their satellite offices.

"Jim has managed the company through some very difficult circumstances," Edson says. Still, Sewall's annual revenues have grown to almost \$20 million during Page's tenure.

An ardent conservationist, Page occasionally escapes to a family cabin in a northern Penobscot County township. With his wife and teenage daughter, Page walks four miles into the woods to reach the isolated camp, which features a view of Mount Katahdin.

"I love Maine," Page says. "I believe the work Sewall does provides value to our clients and to our communities and state. What more could one want?"

Despite his commitment to keep the company in the Pine Tree State, frustrations exist. The state's recent push to enhance broadband access in northern Maine is encouraging, Page says, yet the state's lack of high-tech corporations makes it difficult to attract others. "To be mentioned in the company of a Jackson Lab or Cianbro is an honor. The problem is we need a dozen

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Cianbros and Jackson Labs."

"Stewardship" is a revered concept at the Sewall Company, and one that Page works to honor every day. "You're a steward of something if you hold it in trust for whoever comes after you, and if you leave it better than you found it." □