

Workshop will help keep it all in the family

OPINION



BARRY NELSON

IN BUSINESS

Only about one family business in 10 survives until the third generation.

And there are no university courses or other training available to those who want to learn how to handle the special problems of businesses

owned and managed by fathers, sons, mothers and daughters.

"Ron Southern's ATCO empire started as a small family business, and we are all potential ATCOs if we can learn to deal properly with the issues," says Nils Bodtker, co-chair of programming for the Calgary chapter of the Canadian Association of Family Enterprise.

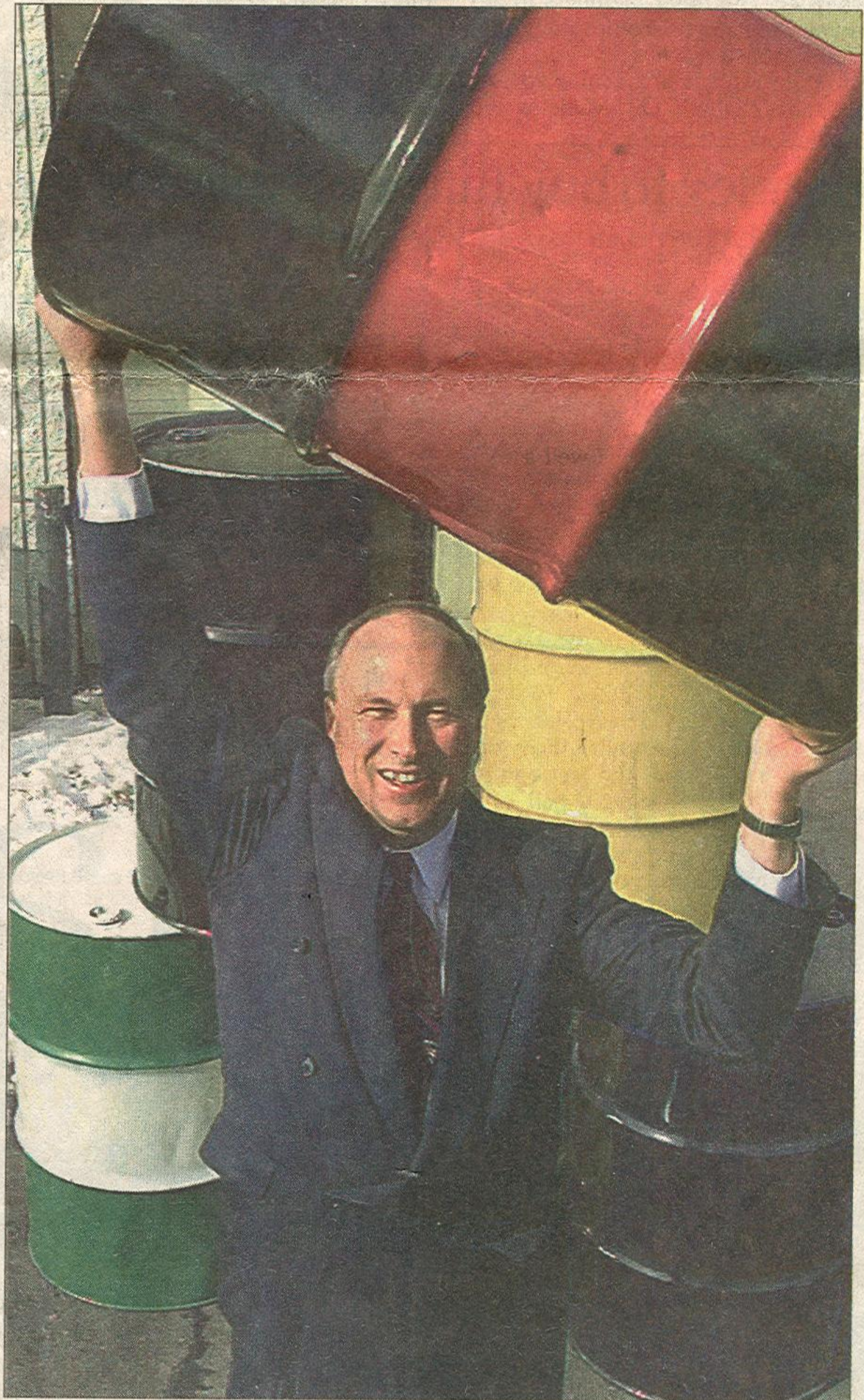
Tomorrow, CAFE will present a day-long workshop featuring John Ward, of the Loyola Graduate School of Business, that will deal with some of the unique problems of family businesses.

The workshop is one of a series of monthly education sessions organized by the Calgary CAFE chapter established in 1990.

The Calgary group, which now includes about 60 businesses that pay \$500 a year to belong, is part of a national organization of about 800 businesses in 13 chapters.

Bodtker's company, Great Western Containers Inc., employs about 135 people and generates annual revenues of about \$25 million from buying, selling and reconditioning 45-gallon drums.

Bodtker's wife, Sylvia, has been vice-president of the company since it was created in 1979. His son Brent, now general manager, has been with the company six years and his daughter, Britta, works on the company's computer operations.



Shannon Oatway, Calgary Herald
Nils Bodtker, a member of the Canadian Association of Family Enterprise, shows off barrels sold by his company, Great Western Containers.

FROM D1

NELSON: Group aids survival of family owned businesses

"I don't have a problem if this business doesn't stay tightly family controlled," Nils Bodtker says.

"My main concern is that the business itself thrives and grows.

"I didn't create this business so that the next generation and generations after that would have a business to live off.

"CAFE isn't to educate people about how make sure a business stays in the family.

"A clearer statement of CAFE's mandate is to ensure the survival of family business, but that does not suggest it has to stay tightly owned, controlled and managed by the family.

"CAFE is a forum for each of us as individuals and the family as a unit to express our personal views, to hear other family business members' views and to hear presentations on relevant topics. That forum is different from what we can do for ourselves."

As an uninformed outsider, I get the impression that CAFE offers no specific solutions to problems and advocates no policies to benefit family businesses. Its only suggestion seems to be that companies should join and pay to attend the workshops it offers.

"I would not counter any of what you say," Bodtker responds.

"That's not really a knock. What that suggests is there is an open door for individuals to come and feel free to express their feelings and to hear there isn't necessarily a fixed solution for every individual's problem.

"This is not a mathematical process where you get down to two plus two equals four.

"In participating in the programs CAFE offers, individuals from companies have an opportunity to hear other views and experiences and meld them to their own way of thinking to help determine their specific direction.

"In our case, it's enabled us to have a really good dialogue among family members that wouldn't necessarily have materialized without CAFE.

"One of the programs CAFE sets up for members that want to be part of it is personal advisory groups. These are groups of eight to 12 individuals, each from a different family, that meet monthly and discuss issues of their choice.

"If a member has a specific problem they feel they can't resolve within their family or their business, they can ask for it to be on the agenda of the personal advisory group and search for resolutions from the group.

"Many CAFE members say the personal advisory group is the heart of the organization or the main benefit of CAFE."

Mike Williamson — sales manager of the Pickford Group, a company started by his grandfather, and president of the Calgary chapter of CAFE — agrees.

"The personal advisory groups have been most beneficial in allowing me to bounce things off people my father's age in dealing with the family dynamics that come from the dining room table to the office."