



PROFILE



Richard Giroux manages Courmark, a subsidiary of the RCCAQ, the association that represents insurance brokers in Quebec.

GO-TO GUY

After nearly a quarter century as a broker and then part owner of a Montreal insurance brokerage, Giroux got the call that would lead to the manager's job at Courmark. But being a top-notch insurance professional that others depend on for advice doesn't mean he's stopped playing the saxophone and singing karaoke. **By Ron Shorvoyce**

Richard Giroux got his start with Wawanesa Insurance in 1980 after following up on a newspaper ad. His time there was brief, but it was enough to get him hooked on the business. A career insurance professional, Giroux now manages Courmark, a subsidiary of the RCCAQ, the association that represents insurance brokers in Quebec. Courmark, created to provide services for the association's brokers, offers RCCAQ members several insurance products and services, including professional liability insurance and a group health plan.

Born and raised in Montreal, Giroux, 55, attended Louis Joseph Papineau high school, graduating in 1977, and then registered at Bois-de-Boulogne College for a two-year

diploma program before enrolling at Montreal University. His dream while in high school was to become a pilot, but bad eyesight put an end to that. Next he thought about becoming an optometrist, but his grades weren't high enough, and he was accepted into physical education instead.

A shortage of jobs in physical education, however, led Giroux into a semester in pharmacology before he decided to work for a while. "That's when I saw the ad for Wawanesa," says Giroux. "I started doing insurance claims. In six months, another job came up at Aetna Casualty. They were looking for claims adjusters."

After only a short while at Aetna, Giroux was laid off when a recession hit the country. Luckily, a headhunting firm recruited him for a position with Soly Chabot Ranger, a Montreal insurance brokerage with roots as far back as 1949. "They were looking for a young man who could eventually take over the company because the owners were in their 50s and 60s and some were looking toward retirement." Giroux started working there in January 1983, staying for 23 years, as a broker and then part owner. "I decided to move on and sold my share in 2006."

Shortly after, Giroux left the company, he got a call from RCCAQ. The association was looking for an experienced broker to work on the e8o insurance program for its brokers. He started with the association in September 2006. Two years later, he took over as manager of Courmark. "I also do some seminars on e8o prevention. I'm basically the go-to guy for insurance. So any questions related to insurance, technical or whatever, I'm the one who answers for that."

Shirley Ng met Giroux through work-related projects almost 10 years ago. Ng is assistant vice-president of corporate solutions for Westport Insurance Corporation in Toronto. Westport is the insurance carrier for Courmark. "Richard is very easygoing and very personable. We've dealt with one other for a number of years now and chat often. He's a decent guy, and it's a pleasure to interact with him. His knowledge of insurance is excellent. He's an experienced broker to begin with."

Courmark's parent organization, RCCAQ, represents 350 brokerages in Quebec. Out of 6,000 brokers in total, about 4,500 are members of the asso-

ciation. RCCAQ has a permanent staff of 10 working out of its office in Longueuil, a city of about 232,000 directly across from Montreal.

Giroux's boss, Guy Parent, met him two and a half years ago when Parent was appointed general manager at RCCAQ. "He's a very knowledgeable broker with tremendous integrity. He's seen a lot of different insurance

cases, and he's the one that I always turn to regarding an insurance interpretation. A lot of brokers call our office, and we always turn to Richard." Giroux's people skills are key to his success, says Parent, and his love of music and entertainment skills make it easy for him to connect with people. Parent adds that Giroux's knowledge of the insurance business helped him settle into his own position as general manager of RCCAQ. Giroux says his job is one of the best in the business because he sells to customers who understand insurance. "My customers are brokers. When you deal with your peers, it's a lot easier than dealing with the general public. But there is an opposite side: sometimes they can be very demanding." The challenge, Giroux says, is convincing brokers that money spent through Courmark eventually benefits them and their organizations.

Giroux spends a lot of time with RCCAQ member brokers, either by telephone or directly through organized tours of the province. "We go and meet brokers across the province to talk about the issues and to tell them about the importance of staying with the association. We also try to meet non-members, to share information and let them know how important it is to join the association."

A big issue in Quebec's insurance industry right now, Giroux says, is the buying and selling of brokerages and the amalgamation of businesses. "Every time one of our members purchases another of our members, we lose a member. Two becomes one. From the standpoint of money, it's a big concern for the RCCAQ." Giroux notes the recent example of a large broker, Lussier, which bought another large broker, Dale Parizeau. Before, two members were paying large fees, now there's only one.

Giroux says that for brokerages to

INSIDE SCOOP

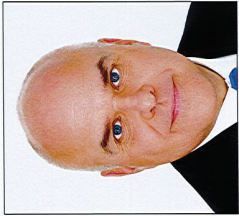
- Giroux has three sons. Maxime, 32, has worked with Intact Insurance and is now with Desjardins, in the credit card department. Marc-André, an avid traveller, is 27 and lives in Scotland, working as a clerk in a large store. Mathieu, 25, also works as a store clerk in Montreal, but is going back to school to study television communications.
- An avid golfer and tennis player, Giroux also enjoys music and plays the saxophone, an instrument he took up in school. "I also really enjoy singing. Karaoke is my thing."
- He's into physical fitness and uses the gym at his condo or goes swimming. "I train a bit."
- Giroux's love of travel has taken him around the world. He was in the Dominican Republic last January.
- His parents are retired and spend their winters in Florida. His father Marcel was a fireman with the City of Montreal. His mother Denise was a manager for CIBC. **IP**

grow organically in Quebec is very difficult. He adds that baby boomers who own agencies are now cashing in and retiring. "All this makes our job at RCCAQ very difficult."

One of his specialties at Courmark is dealing with the technical aspects of insurance. He enjoys deciphering the wording of policies and helping out when claims might come into question.

He also likes handling legal issues that arise from the association's e8o program. "I enjoy dealing with lawyers," says Giroux. "We have a great team of lawyers working for us. They're big guns and come from four or five of the best firms in Quebec." They defend Courmark's brokers whenever the need arises.

Will Giroux ever go back to running his own business? Supported by a fantastic team of colleagues at RCCAQ and Courmark, Giroux says he's enjoying his work too much to think about doing anything else. **IP**



Parent

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