

Profile of Carden Welsh

We are pleased to present this profile of Carden Welsh, who is now concluding his second three-year term (with a one-year hiatus in the middle) on the Durham Town Council. Monday was his last meeting.

In reflecting on his experience Carden said, “Serving on the Town Council is a great way to try to do something positive for the community. I really enjoyed the work. I learned about a variety of things that were new to me – infrastructure, water, sewer, police, fire, planning, zoning, taxation. It truly is fascinating. We are lucky. There are a lot of bright people in Durham with expertise in many areas. I had to sharpen my debating and negotiating skills in order to persuade other council members of my position.”

He added, “The Town staff is very good. They are willing to help and they try to explain complicated things clearly.” He was especially struck by the Town Administrator’s adroitness in dealing with never-ending challenges and controversies such as the holiday celebration, Seacoast Reliability, the murals at the Post Office, student apartment developments, Indigenous People’s Day, and of course, the budget. “Responding to these issues takes a lot of time, skill, and patience. You need to learn to listen to everybody whether they have a legitimate point or not. It is a bit different from the hierarchical structure of the private sector.”

Jay Gooze, a former Town Council member, talked Carden into joining town government. Carden was taking some graduate history courses at UNH at the time and his professor, Gregory McMahon, taught that in Ancient Rome, it was the responsibility of all good citizens to participate in government affairs. He took that admonition to heart.

Carden moved to Durham in 1991 to take the position of treasurer with the Timberland Company. Timberland is famous for its yellow waterproof work boots, but they manufacture a range of outdoor wear products. Their motto was, “Boots, shoes, apparel, wind, water, earth, and sky.” The company, now based in Stratham, grew tremendously in the years that Carden was there (He retired in 2012) and today has thousands of employees around the world and annual revenue of around \$2 billion.

“Timberland was a wonderful place to work. It was a lot of fun and always a bit informal. Someone said that we were ‘relentlessly adolescent’ but I prefer to think we were entrepreneurial and fast moving. Timberland was one of the first companies to offer paid volunteer days. I would estimate that 95% of the people who worked there were really happy. Many companies talk about this kind of culture but Timberland had it.”

Much of the credit was due to the family that ran Timberland. Carden quoted the maxim, “An organization is the lengthened shadow of a single person” (or in this case a family). Timberland was founded by Nathan Swartz, a Russian immigrant. His son Sidney was the chairman and

Sidney's son Jeff the president during Carden's time. "They were good hearted, smart, creative, informal people...But they did get cranky if you mispronounced their name, 'It is *Swartz* not *Schwartz*!'"

Carden started in finance but later oversaw operations which involved travel to Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, and China to tour manufacturing facilities. "Visiting industrial areas in the third world makes you appreciate living here. The factories themselves were well run, but the countries often did not have the levels of basic sanitation, clean water, nor garbage collection that we are used to in western countries."

While many consider the Town of Durham to have an exceptional culture (evidenced, for example, by low staff turnover), Carden says that government cannot be as fluid as a company like Timberland. "Here, people must have clear expertise in their given area. No matter how capable Dave Kurz and Dave Emanuel may be [police chief and fire chief, respectively] they cannot switch positions. Just imagine Dave Kurz trying to put out a fire! I was moved to international business and at first, I knew little about it. My whole career had been in finance. I was just deemed to be a good manager. With this flexibility over time you get people who know a lot about different areas. Government must operate more formally because it has to be transparent and accountable."

Timberland was sold to V. F. Corporation in 2011 and the Swartz family is no longer involved. Carden concedes that it is probably a more "corporate-type organization" now. "It is difficult to maintain such an entrepreneurial culture as a division as opposed to an independent company."

Carden grew up outside of Philadelphia and went to school at Lower Merion, the same high school attended by the late NBA great Kobe Bryant. (Note that it was Kobe, not Carden, who lead the Aces to a state championship in 1996.)

He went on to study economics at Tufts University and met his future wife Ann, an economics major from Smith College, while both were in a program in Brussels focused on the European Union. Yes, they still talk about economics. Ann's first job was with Lehman Brothers but rest assured; she was not the one who put them under. She has also been active in local affairs here, serving on the school board, the conservation commission, the Lamprey River Advisory Committee, and the Southeast Land Trust. Ann was a driver behind the establishment of the Oyster River Forest.

Carden got an MBA from Columbia University and worked in finance for several companies before relocating to Durham. He and Ann have four children (all graduates of Oyster River) and 13 grandchildren. "Being a grandparent is one of the wonderful things in life. They think you are great." But he adds, "That will probably end when they are about ten years old."

He likes to read, camp, fish, snowboard and travel, especially with his grandchildren. Carden and Ann are going to Antarctica this fall to see the ice, penguins, and other animals. Happily, we think there is a good chance he will return to service for the town...after a hiatus.