

# YOUNG RETAILER OFFERS FRESH PERSPECTIVE TO FAMILY BUSINESS

BY GEOFFREY McLARNEY

**Rebecca Wichers-Schreur started working for her parents right after finishing her master's degree to help get their new store up and running. Three years later, she's become an integral member of the team and a large part of its success.**

**R**ebecca Wichers-Schreur's introduction to the home improvement industry was all about timing. When her mother Laurie Wichers-Schreur bought Wood Works of Renfrew, Ont., in 2016 with her spouse Bruce Gannon, Wichers-Schreur was just graduating from Queen's University with her master's degree in industrial relations.

"I finished in June when they were finalizing the sale," she recalls.

The trio, Wichers-Schreur explains, were all completely new to the industry. Her mother and stepfather had heard of the store through the grapevine and thought it was a good opportunity. Both had other jobs, however, which kept them from being in the store on a full-time basis. Bruce is an electrical contractor and Laurie was working full-time for a public service union.

Though the family faced a whirlwind three years, as Wichers-Schreur puts it, the combination of her degrees in industrial organization and communications put her in good stead to get the company on track.

When her parents acquired the Renfrew store, it had just five employees. Now, aided by her efforts, it has swelled to 19 and the company has added a second store in nearby Burnstown. Both stores operate under the Castle banner.

After slumping sales in the first year, the Renfrew store underwent a physical transformation spearheaded by Wichers-Schreur, before a grand reopening in the summer of 2017. By the end of the year, sales had nearly doubled compared to the year before.

Another part of her job has been an overhaul of the stores' marketing, including a social media blitz to raise their profile.



**It's a family affair. From left to right: Laurie Wichers-Schreur, Bruce Gannon, Rebecca Wichers-Schreur, Gerritt Wichers-Schreur, Kimberly Gannon.**

The Burnstown store, as McLeod Building Supplies, had been closed for a few years when the Wichers-Schreurs and Gannon took over. "Trying to get the word out that it's back open" has been Wichers-Schreur's main objective for the location. A series of YouTube videos kept customers updated on the progress of renovations at the store.

"Both stores have completely redesigned websites," Wichers-Schreur adds, while the company Facebook page has become more active under her watch. With a new online catalogue, "people can now purchase through our website, which is fantastic."

A new flyer program covers both stores. "I also instituted a loyalty program where you can earn points or cash back, which has been very popular," says Wichers-Schreur.

Still contractor-oriented, Wood Works of Renfrew has nevertheless moved to broaden its appeal, adding new offerings in kitchen

and seasonal categories as well as changing paint vendors.

When she started out, Wichers-Schreur thought she was just helping out for a short time. "I kind of thought it would be more of a temporary thing," she reflects. "But three years later, I'm still here."

What's kept her in the role long after she thought she'd have moved on is how every day is different, and each new challenge helps her expand her horizons.

"We have a great base of customers and getting to know them and their projects has been great. Everyone's been so welcoming and supportive," says Wichers-Schreur. "It's been a big learning curve for me, but so interesting—getting to learn things I'd never learn and experience things I'd never experience. It's so rewarding when you get to see something you've started come to life."