

# ALUMNUS LEADS BC-BASED CONSULTING FIRM



Summer jobs don't often get much attention. For many students, they are a way to make money for the coming school year, and if they learn a thing or two along the way that's a bonus.

But for alumnus **John Drew**, a summer job changed his academic focus completely, leading him to eventually establish one of BC's most successful forest management companies.

Born in Kamloops and raised in Salmon Arm, John was one of six children in a sawmilling family. His father never had the opportunity for postsecondary education, so as John says, "It was always a priority for us kids to go to university somewhere. UBC appealed to me because it was relatively close."

John was accepted into the Faculty of Commerce (now Sauder School of Business) at UBC, where he intended to apply his business knowledge to help with the family business.

However the summer before entering UBC John got a job working in forestry that changed his

path completely. "I was doing timber development for cut blocks as well as some firefighting, and I loved it," he says. "I switched out of commerce to science, because back then forestry students had to take first year sciences. I never attended a single business class!"

John met his wife Cherilyn in high school, and she also attended UBC, in the Faculty of Agriculture (now Land and Food Systems). They were married in 1981.

John graduated with a BSF in 1984, and entered an extremely tough job market. "The BC economy wasn't doing very well then," he says. "My dad had lost his sawmill, so the vision of working in that business was gone. I got a summer job working in Houston for Weldwood, but they weren't hiring permanent staff and I got laid off in the fall."

Expecting their first child, John and Cherilyn moved back to Salmon Arm to live with family while getting back on their feet. John began to do contract work with local companies, learning more about forestry with each

one. "It was challenging to move back home without work, but we were both pretty determined and independent," he says.

In 1987 John established Forsite along with two partners. The initial focus of the company was timber development and reforestation, based on the strengths of the principals. "When we started out we used our diverse skills and training to give clients the services they needed," he says. "After a few years, as we started to grow, we began to get involved in strategic planning and forging a future several years out. We have been committed to that process ever since."

Today Forsite employs over 130 people and has 11 offices in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. The company is headquartered in Salmon Arm.

"We have become known for the ability to bring the right team together to package solutions for our customers. We have a broad range of skill sets across the company," John says.

"Our success is tied very closely to our people," he adds. "We have people here who are very specialized and they are experts in their fields. And we have very good project managers as well. We spend a lot of time doing employee reviews and finding out what people want in their careers; then we incorporate those desires into our strategic plan for the business."

"We also employ a lot of UBC graduates," John says. "When you work for Forsite, you can use your training differently in different projects, and you will always be seeing and learning new things. There are lots of opportunities for career development and growth."