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Among the other notable news items in 2008 was this interesting milestone: for the first time in history, retail is now the No. 1 employer in Canada.

In May, a Statistics Canada report on 2007 retail sales noted that, as retail sales rose 5.8 per cent over the previous year, more Canadians were employed in retail in 2007 than in manufacturing — 1,790,000 retail jobs on average compared to 1,784,700 in manufacturing. And while official figures for 2008 are not yet available, retail expansion in Canada, coupled with continuing challenges in the manufacturing sector, means that gap is only likely to grow larger this year.

What does this mean for retailers? For one thing, it underlines the increasing importance we play in the Canadian economy, and it's a heady reminder of the responsibilities retailers share as economic leaders and environmental stewards. But on another level, it raises the question: Just who *are* these almost two million Canadians now working in retail?

Ask a statistician and you may hear a lot about averages — women comprise about 54 per cent of the workforce, one-third of retail workers are between the ages of 15 and 24, about 200,000 are self-employed — but smart retailers know you don't succeed in this business by relying on averages alone. More than just about anything else, the success of a retail business rests on the pride and professionalism of its people, which is why retailers invest heavily in recruitment, training and retention programs.

The people in the following 10 profiles are nowhere near a representative sample of the retail industry, but they do represent a wide range of fields and interests, from a truck driver to a visual designer to a fellow who arguably has the sweetest job in retail. While their titles and talents may differ, what they do have in common is their desire to bring their talents to the service of an industry they love, not to mention a passion for being part of a successful business.

As a way of acknowledging retail's new status as the nation's No. 1 employer, we here at *Canadian Retailer* thought a brief introduction to some of the industry's heroes — unsung or otherwise — would be an appropriate way to note this milestone. It's also a useful exercise for retailers looking for a better understanding of what it will take to draw more outstanding people like them into the retail trade... because chances are we're not finished growing yet. ■

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The Communicator

When you travel the world, it's smart staying in touch with your roots. Just ask Robert Sarnar. BY VICTOR CHARD

Name: Robert Sarnar
Position: Director of Communications and Public Affairs, Roots Canada
Start Date: 2004

“I first met Michael (Budman) and Don (Green) in Toronto in 1977,” says Sarnar, recalling how he approached Roots’ co-founders with the idea of backing a Toronto city magazine he was trying to launch at the time. “I had a whole prototype and prospectus, and I was looking for would-be investors, so I thought why not contact the two guys from Roots?”

He says they were receptive to meet with him, and notes they “quite wisely did not put a dime into my venture.” He never raised the necessary funds to get his magazine off the ground and he later took an editorial position at *The Canadian* weekly. The day he was hired there, he ran into Budman who, upon learning of his new

position, invited him into his store and gave him a Roots bag to mark the occasion.

In 1980, while working in Paris as a journalist and covering a student demonstration just down the street from where Roots had a store, Sarnar heard his name called out in the midst of the commotion, and when he turned around he saw that it was Budman and Green, who had recognized him by the Roots bag he was carrying. Budman was moving to Paris that fall to explore and manage more opportunities for Roots in Europe, and Sarnar and Budman later became friends in part by being linemates on a Paris hockey team for several seasons.

Their friendship became stronger and eventually Budman (and Green) did invest in a publication Sarnar had created, *Paris Passion*, of which he was the editor for almost 10 years before he moved to Israel, working for the *Jerusalem Post* and Israel Television. During this time,

as part of his freelance work, he created and edited a colour newspaper for Roots called *The Roots Reporter*, which helped the retailer promote itself to customers.

In 2004, Sarnar decided to move with his family to Canada, and one week before leaving Israel, Budman and Green called him up to ask him to take on his current role.

“If I did not have such a great respect and affinity for Michael and Don and what they had developed with Roots over the years, I would not have accepted their offer and left my journalistic career behind,” says Sarnar. “The intrinsically great story at the heart of Roots and the core values that govern the company make my work doing external communication with journalists and internal communication with the staff so much more engaging and gratifying.”

Crediting “the incredible amount of heart, soul, brains, and passion driving the company” for keeping him coming back every day, he says he has no idea on where life is going to take him next, and that’s half the fun: “I had no master plan when I began my career and first embarked on this journey, and I still don’t.” ■

The Giver

Being a Wal-Mart greeter is Judy Cruickshank’s job; being a great human being... well, she does that for free. BY BRENDA CRAIG

A small woman with sparkling blue eyes and a quick smile stands just inside the front door of the Wal-Mart store on Kamloops’ south shore, ready to wrangle shopping carts, offer directions to shoppers in hurry or give a kind hello. Judy Cruickshank has been a Wal-Mart greeter since the store first flung its doors open to shoppers in British Columbia’s booming interior more

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