

## **Darrell Jones shares keys to Overwaitea's success**

*Overwaitea Food Group president has worked at company for 40+ years, starting as a bag boy in grade 11.*

As the driving force behind Overwaitea Food Group's (OFG) unprecedented success, Darrell Jones has made a career of blending big picture thinking with little picture details.

The head of B.C.'s largest grocery store chain is known to many for his friendly television commercials and unassuming manner, but a 40+ year career with OFG has taught him critical lessons in strategy and what it takes to recognize and seize opportunity in a rapidly changing grocery field.

Speaking to a sold out FCPC Trade Talks event, Jones explained that exciting times are ahead for Overwaitea Food Group. Jones is overseeing the largest expansion in his company's 102-year history. He aims to raise OFG's store count to 200 stores by the year 2020, from 163 today, with the lion's share of the outlets being branded Save-On-Foods.

"Our growth, along with the strongest same store sales of any major retailer in Canada, translated into a .6% market share growth in the West," Jones explained. With over 18,000 team members, OFG serves more than two million customers a week. Trust for the Save-On-Foods brand has increased through the decades and a recent Ipsos Reid poll found that Save-On-Foods was British Columbia's most trusted brand.

The trust of consumers is notable as Jones moves to phase out of the Overwaitea name, which all of the OFG stores carried in 1968, when B.C. billionaire and current owner Jim Pattison bought the chain. Pattison created the Save-On-Foods brand in 1982 and made that grocery store banner a subsidiary of OFG. Recently, the company has been consolidating several brands under the Save-On-Foods banner as it moves to broaden its market presence in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.



*Darrel Jones, President, Save-on-Foods and Errol Cerit, SVP Industry Affairs & Member Services, FCPC*

Save-on-Foods is making major investments not only along traditional lines, but key areas like warehousing, technology, buying systems and infrastructure to support its rapid and continued growth plans, all to ensure long term health while evolving and staying ahead of the times.

Jones is quick to acknowledge that the grocery environment is not without risk, gross margins for retailers are thin and new low-cost rivals are heavily discounting products, however, his optimism is built upon his belief that his company has strengths that go well beyond just pricing. To him, value includes store ambiance and freshness as well as offerings such as online ordering and community participation.

“We have been very aggressive in growing our online offerings, we are attracting a significant base of new customers – most of whom enjoy all three service delivery options – pick-up, delivery right to their kitchen, and of course, bricks and mortar. The changes we are making are about positioning the company not for the next quarter but for the next decade.”

On vendor relationships, Jones says it’s like any other relationship “At the end of the day we are in the people business, taking care of our people is the foundation of our success and this is the same for our supplier partner relationships.”

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