

Dr. Joseph Ng

We all know perfectly well that life is not without its challenges, often offering only limited choices, and it takes a person with tremendous perseverance and remarkable foresight to turn these obstacles into successes. The Chair of the JNE Group of Companies, Joe Ng, looks back on his past: from his escape to Hong Kong in childhood, to studying abroad in Canada, to building a business in Hamilton, Ontario. He creates æwealthÆ out of a life of æperchanceÆ happenings, and on this difficult life journey he also makes a commitment to pay back society.

Joe often attends charity events frequented by Canadian politicians and the social elite, his donations among the most generous on record, but he did not come from a wealthy family background, and his childhood was a difficult one. He was born in Guangdong province, his father a business man working year-round in Macau. After JoeÆs father made some money from his business, he was able to go back home to purchase land and businesses. In 1949, in the midst of political upheavals in China, Joe NgÆs family was branded as æbusiness owner and landlordÆ, the target of mass class struggle at that time. His father could no longer return to China. JoeÆs mother had to go to Guangzhou to get a job, leaving his grandmother to take care of Joe and his two younger siblings. His grandmother, a traditional Chinese woman with bound feet, could not do house work. The heavy household burden fell on young JoeÆs shoulders, until he turned twelve and was able to follow his fatherÆs steps to Hong Kong.

His difficult childhood ingrained in his bones, Joe deeply understands the lives of poor people. He knows how one has to struggle to better oneself, and wants to use his resources to help others.

When Joe was about to graduate from high school, he faced different paths for his future. Limited by what his family could afford, Joe did not really have too many choices. Down the road he wanted to practice his chosen profession in Hong Kong, where only British Commonwealth university degrees were recognized. Not only was Canada one of the British Commonwealth countries, it was also one with the lowest school fees. Accepting reality, Joe decided to attend the University of New Brunswick in 1968.

The choice of engineering was a practical one considering the good prospect of jobs after graduation. Once in Canada Joe experienced a more difficult environment than he anticipated. In the 1960s, living conditions everywhere were more difficult. Joe, being the first one to go abroad in his family, did not have any relatives in Canada, and his family did not have the resources to pay for his tuition. Joe worked to support his studies. Every summer he had to make enough money to pay for tuition and room and board for the following year. The hardworking spirit that he cultivated growing up allowed him to juggle his studies and work.

Following graduation, Joe came to Steeltown Hamilton to work as an electrical engineer. It was a steady and well paid position, and Joe could have coasted along until his retirement. So how did he end up building his own business? Joe calls it an accidental opportunity. The consulting company that Joe was with had assigned him to work in a steel company. After three years, Joe thought it was time to change his surroundings. He resigned from the consulting company, intending to find a new position in Toronto. However, much to JoeÆs surprise, the steel company thought so highly of his work that it insisted that he continue to work for them. Not able to return to the consulting company, Joe formed his own firm and

named it Joe Ng Engineering to continue the engineering design work. From that point on, the reputation of JNE increasingly grew, and Joe began building the business. Today, JNE has become one of the biggest independent engineering companies in Canada.

Initially JNE offered engineering design and consulting services to large steel companies. But soon the steel industry went into a rut, and this unexpectedly created another opportunity for Joe. He started to look for business possibilities in China, taking a gingerly first step, not knowing that this first step would balloon to three 10 year expansion plans over a span of thirty years. In the first 10-year plan Joe sold used equipment to China, moving two oil refineries and one fertilizer manufacturing plant there and putting them into production.

In the second 10 year plan, Joe was actively involved with the Canadian federal government, which provided monetary and technical aid to China to help with its economic reform. JNE was one of the first Canadian engineering companies there, assisting with the privatization of Chinese national steel and gas industries. It provided engineering design and rebuilding services, with projects ranging from a million to 40 million dollars, contributing tremendously to the Chinese economy by offering funds at low interest rates from Canada.

In the third 10 year plan Joe worked with large scale Chinese national industries, helping them break into international markets outside China.

Over the last 30 years Joe has made an outstanding contribution to engineering design and economic development in China. At the same time he has helped develop a good working relationship between the two countries at both political and business levels, accompanying prime ministers and government officials to visit China numerous times.

Since the early 90s, JNE has been developing its international business, and has built an internal infrastructure to provide comprehensive engineering services. It hires the best talents in engineering and design, technicians, and project managers from all over the world and provides the most advanced technical services to client firms. In addition to the steel industry, JNE has expanded to offer engineering and consulting services to power, chemical and automation industries all over the world. Its service areas cover China, Japan, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Mexico and Columbia, employing four hundred staff. Joe is now the Chair of the JNE Group while his son John Ng has recently taken over the post of Chief Executive Officer.

In May 2013, Joe received an Honorary Doctor Degree of Science from the University of New Brunswick recognizing his exceptional achievements in engineering and his contribution to society. Previously he was conferred the Honorary Doctorate degrees of Law from McMaster University in 2003 and the University of Prince Edward in 2008.

Joe likes to stay low-key in what he does. Most people don't know that he has close ties with many top-level decision makers in both political and business worlds, often providing help behind the scenes. He has close personal relationships with two former prime ministers, Jean Chretien and Paul Martin. Not only is Joe able to promote the Chinese Canadian community through his network, but he also contributes his resources to society using this channel. In 2010, upon the recommendation of ex-prime minister Paul

Martin, the French Indian Chief of a Manitoba tribe called Joe up to see if he could help the Manitoba natives establish businesses and promote local economic development. Joe committed to help, but considering that the natives had a low educational level, it would be difficult for them to establish any high-tech industries. Coincidentally, within his conglomerate of companies, there was a cleaning firm of over 100 employees providing cleaning services for universities, high schools and hospitals. So he introduced this business model to the native community, looking after the business start-up and training until the native community was able to stand on their own. Now they are totally independent, and the business is doing well, since the Government of Canada has to allocate one third of their work to native communities when outsourcing. They are extremely grateful to Joe for his help.

Throughout his life, Joe has encountered many situations in both his personal growth and business development that he could not change or where he did not have much choice, but these obstacles enabled him to cultivate his *æcan do* spirit, and practise his own motto: *æreceive from community; give to community*.

From the day he started his first job, Joe has not stopped giving back. His reputation is well known in the City of Hamilton. Beginning with setting up Chinese schools in the 1970s in Hamilton, Joe gradually got more and more involved in the community. He is a long-time supporter of McMaster University, University of Waterloo, Hamilton Art Gallery, Hamilton Health Science Foundation and United Way. He donated \$1 million to McMaster University's Faculty of Engineering for an endowed chair in infrastructure renewal. He also donated a scholarship in his father's name for foreign students. Five to ten freshmen students would get \$2000 each towards their tuition.

Joe also donated \$1 million to Hamilton Health Science Foundation, and was the Chair of the medical foundation for three years. He donated \$900,000 to the Hamilton Art Gallery to build a Joe Ng Gallery. The Eva Rothwell Centre at Robert Land, built by funds raised by Joe, became the most comprehensive social services organization in Hamilton. Joe has always stressed the importance of a good educational foundation. He donated to the breakfast plan in Barton Secondary School, and was the honorary school principal for the Hamilton Chinese School. Joe also donates generously to local hockey and baseball teams to encourage youth sports. At the same time, Joe feels senior services are very important, so he also donates generously to Yee Hong senior services. These donations are so numerous that Joe has lost count.

Now Joe has stepped aside to let the next generation take over. But he says, *ôI am the type of person who cannot stop. I would retire from one position only to take on another. I hope my children will all be able to contribute to society.ö* Joe's business successes, his contributions to community and to the friendly relationship between China and Canada make him the role model for Canadian society. His exceptional achievements will motivate more Chinese Canadians to work for our community and become pillars of our nation.