Danby's Jim Estill invested into Order of Canada

BY JAIME MYSLIK





Jim Estill, CEO of Danby Appliances in Guelph-Eramosa, was one of 40 individuals to receive the Order of Canada medal earlier this year from Governor General Julie Payette at a ceremony in Ottawa at Rideau Hall.

GUELPH - Local businessman Jim Estill was recently invested into the Order of Canada.

"Jim Estill is a highly regarded entrepreneur in the Guelph and Waterloo technology communities," stated a Governor General of Canada press release.

Estill, owner and CEO of Danby Appliances in Guelph-Eramosa, was one of 40 recipients invested by Governor General Julie Payette into the Order of Canada on March 14 at Rideau Hall.

"I'm honoured ... but the key is it's not why I do what I do," Estill told Business Leader.

He began his career from the trunk of his car.

As an engineer he needed a computer for circuit board design, but it was a better deal to buy two.

"So I bought two computers and sold one," Estill said. "And then someone else wanted one so I bought another two and then someone needed a printer so I bought a printer, and then someone needed some software - and so then pretty soon I'm buying and selling computers."

The business soon became EMJ Data, Estill's tech distribution company. He eventually sold EMJ Data to Synnex Canada in Guelph.

"When I left Synnex we were doing about $2 billion a year in sales," Estill said.

"So, it's start from the trunk of your car and end up at two billion in sales."

He has also invested in 150 technology businesses.

"He remains committed to the growth of the tech community through his mentorship of budding entrepreneurs and his financial investment in start-up companies," the Governor General of Canada press release stated.

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Estill was a founding director of Blackberry and remained on the board for 13 years.

However, he has noticed that to really make a difference with the businesses in which he invests, he needs an average of 13 years and has chosen to focus on different aspects now.

"I [realized] when I wasn't operating a business (that) I enjoy operating more than just being a board member," he said.

"More than just being an adviser, so I like operating a business. So that's why I'm doing what I do now."

Estill started out on the board of Danby Appliances about nine years ago. After five years, when the current CEO resigned, Estill stepped in, ran the company for a year and then purchased it.

"But I am at heart a tech guy," Estill said.

So recently Danby has launched Parcel Guard, a secure option for parcels that are delivered to doorsteps.

"When a parcel gets dropped you get an email or a text that you got the box," he said. "You can [also] open it with the app."

Estill branched outside the fridge and freezer market because Parcel Guard is essentially a big box at its core.

He estimates that within a decade most people in North America will have a parcel mailbox.

"Most people are getting deliveries from Amazon and e-commerce sites all the time and parcel theft is a real thing," Estill said.

With about 70 million stand-alone houses in North America, Estill said if 70 per cent of the population adopts Parcel Guard, 50 million units will be sold.

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"I'm not arrogant enough to think we'll be the only supplier; there'll be other suppliers," Estill said.

He noted Parcel Guard works well with other Danby products

"It's going to be roughly the same size as a freezer," Estill said. "They'll probably get replaced at the same rate as freezers which is about once every 10 years ... and it's about the same price point as a freezer so it's comparable."

Because Parcel Guard is one of the first on the market, Estill said he thinks Danby could grab a greater market share.

"To start with we need to have one that sort of stands out because people don't have it yet, so the person doesn't know where to put the parcel," Estill said.

"So it needs to stand up a little, but within a decade you may disguise it as a bench or you can have a chest, you can have different versions."

"We're really excited that Parcel Guard by Danby is the first smart mailbox on the market to give consumers a way to avoid missed parcel deliveries and stop parcel theft."

In addition to his contributions to the local tech community, Estill was chosen for the Order of Canada because of his charitable work sponsoring about 89 refugee families to Guelph.

He plans to bring another 59 refugee families to Canada this year.



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