

In his role overseeing Canadian Solar's development and investment business across Asia-Pacific, Jeff Roy addresses large groups of professionals.



IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN, JEFF ROY ('08) LEADS DIVERSE TEAM TO INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS

By Rachel Cooper ('89)

A business degree from Acadia can take you halfway around the world. For Jeff Roy ('08), a BBA that helped land him a job with a boutique consulting company in Ottawa led to opportunities he couldn't have imagined. One of the consulting company's clients was Canadian Solar, which operates on six continents and employs over 13,000 people. Jeff worked on that file and, two years later, Canadian Solar hired him.

In April 2015, Jeff relocated to Tokyo as Canadian Solar's general manager for Japan, with his wife, Sarah MacGregor ('08) and their two young children. Since then, the Japan business has become a significant contributor to the company's net income, and last year the focus of the Japan team was expanded to identify

development opportunities in Taiwan and Korea. In 2019, Jeff was promoted to oversee the development and investment business across Asia-Pacific, a territory that encompasses Australia, Southeast Asia, North Asia and India.

Life in Japan

The move to Japan was a big leap for the family, Jeff says. "Sarah is from Glace Bay, NS, and when I was transferred from Ottawa to Guelph, that was the farthest she wanted to be from Halifax. It took a little convincing to commit to two years in Japan. But she adapted very quickly, and now we both enjoy being here."

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Jeff Roy and Sarah MacGregor
with their three children.

In fact, the family has adapted so well that their original two-year commitment was extended to four in 2017 and has recently been extended for a further two years. Sarah, a qualified dietitian, works about one day a week providing dietitian services at a local physician's office in Tokyo. Their two older children are now six and four, and the youngest – born in Japan – is one.

"The personal side and the work side are different. We have enough language skills to get around Tokyo using taxis and in restaurants and the city has been training people for the 2020 Summer Olympics, so we're finding a lot of English capabilities now," says Jeff, who speaks what he calls 'survival Japanese.'

"On the work side, the majority of people in my office speak some level of English, and most of my day-to-day colleagues speak English as their first language," he adds. "I also have a full-time translator in our office who can interpret when we're meeting clients, service providers or other stakeholders."

Of the nearly 100 people in the Tokyo office, just over 60 per cent are Japanese, with the rest either settled foreigners or ex-pats like Jeff. "We've always had at least 10 different nationalities in the office, which is very unusual for Japan when you consider the size of our office," he says. "Our diversity is sometimes our biggest challenge, but it's also the biggest contributor to our success. We get a lot of different views on every problem. There's a lot of discussion and even opposition, but I believe the diversity of backgrounds and opinions gets us to the optimal solution."

Diversity Begins at Acadia

Although originally from Ottawa, Jeff has roots in Nova Scotia. His first visit to the Acadia campus was on a beautiful fall day. "It was a peaceful setting, and it felt like somewhere I could learn and excel. It checked a lot

of boxes," he says.

One reason for choosing a small university was the potential for diversity within his circle of friends. "You don't just have friends from your program. I have close friends now whose careers are in kinesiology, engineering, medicine – you get a breadth of friends that I'm not sure larger schools can provide," he says. "I met a really good group in Tower, and the majority of us are still connected." Being part of the lacrosse program broadened his circle even more.

Acadia business students can operate within an environment that's similar to what they'll face in their careers, Jeff believes. "Smaller teams. Smaller groups. Core teams in business are often 10 people, and most people work in small or medium-sized businesses," he points out. "That aligns more with what a small program in a small school can offer. In retrospect, it wasn't something that drove me to go to Acadia, but it's one of the things that has helped me in my career."

Acadia Reminiscence



"I remember the communications course being stressful. Public speaking, getting in front of a group, wasn't in my comfort zone when I started at Acadia. But, by the end, I developed a higher level of confidence, partly because we got to know our classmates and the classrooms. Now I do sessions in Japan where I'm speaking to two or three hundred professionals in the field. Those classes still resonate with me, because they connected with a lot of what I need to do now." – Jeff Roy