



The Hinsdalean

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Hinsdale, Illinois | Monday, July 19, 2010

Published July 15, 2010

60 SECONDS

CRAIG BOUCHARD

- ONE OF SEVEN CHILDREN • HAS TWIN GRANDDAUGHTERS
- ATTENDED ILLINOIS STATE ON A BASEBALL SCHOLARSHIP
- IS WORKING TO BRING CUBS SPRING TRAINING TO NAPLES
- HELPED FOUND A MATHEMATICS SOFTWARE COMPANY
- SPENT 19 YEARS IN BANKING

Craig Bouchard's home office offers a glimpse into his life. Framed articles from the Wall Street Journal, Barron's, the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Sun-Times hang on the walls. Bins marked "Cubs," "Esmark" and "New Esmark" line the shelves on one side of the room while crystal awards, photos of his six children (ages 33 to 5) and origami animals his daughters made fill the shelves on the other. A giant computer screen dominates his desk and much of his time. Although he and his brother, Jim, sold their steel company, Esmark, in 2008, he has plenty of projects to keep him busy — owning two small oil companies, the Naples Bath and Tennis Club in Florida and a company that leases jets to organ transplant teams. Then there's the rebirth of Esmark, whose name the Bouchards still own. "We have a fairly strong presence in steel again," Bouchard said. The brothers took a small steel company of 22 employees and \$4 million in revenue in 2003 and, in four years, grew it into the fourth largest steel company in the country with 4,500 employees and \$4 billion in revenue. But Bouchard may be proudest of a more artistic venture, a children's novel that he is finishing. "I actually think the book will be my greatest accomplishment because I think it will make the biggest contribution in the end." The fairy tale is about Ai, a 9-year-old Japanese girl, and contains the messages Bouchard hopes to leave with his three young daughters. "When you're a parent and you tell them, they don't listen very much, but if they read it, it's a whole different thing," he said. The book will be Bouchard's second. The first, "America for Sale: How the Foreign Pack Circled and Devoured Esmark," he co-wrote with Jim Koch, a professor he met as a student at Illinois State University. Bouchard missed about a month of school his junior year after seriously injuring his foot during a spring break baseball trip. "All my teachers said, 'Just drop, because you're going to get an F. Just drop and start over next semester,'" recalled Bouchard, confessing that he was never a very good student. All except his economics teacher, who offered to tutor him, as did Koch, chairman of the economics department. "They both pitched in and convinced me to finish school the next year and go to grad school in economics in their department. They both spent a lot of time on me personally. From that point on, my grades went up." When it came time to form a board of directors for Esmark, Bouchard invited Koch to the table. "He went through all the hostile battles. He was very helpful and we were very close friends," Bouchard said. After the company was sold in 2008, Koch encouraged him to document the experience. "Jim was egging me on — 'C'mon, write a book. I'll do it with you,'" Bouchard recalled. "It was pretty popular in the steel industry. It's not like I'm challenging the 'Twilight' author or anything." Bouchard has been successful in just about everything he's done, dating back to his days in Hinsdale Little League, when he made headlines in the local papers. His siblings, two of whom have passed away, have been successful as well. "It's type A all the way," he said with a laugh, blaming the family trait on his parents. His father, Bob, worked for Inland Steel for 35 years. "He was one of three guys, if I know the story right, who started as a mail clerk and finished on the executive floor," he said. His mom, Helen, was an administrative assistant at the company when the two met. "She outranked my father in the first couple of years," he said. Bouchard's family moved to Hinsdale when he was in sixth grade, and he attended St. John of the Cross School before moving on to Hinsdale Central. He thought about sending his kids to private school but decided against it. "I just love Madison," he said from his third floor office on Clay Street, whose window looks out onto the school. "I love the teachers there. Mindy (McMahon), the principal, is a superstar. She's great." A big Red Devil booster as well, he and his brother contributed funds to build Central's Bouchard Family Fitness Center. "I think it's the greatest high school in the state. I think Madison is the best grade school in the state. People don't realize how lucky we are to have places like that to go to school." Among other favorite causes are the J. Kyle Braid Leadership Foundation and Girls are Best, a charity he established to mentor and support disadvantaged girls in Naples, his family's home six months out of the year. "If you're in business, you've got to take a chunk of your profits and plow it back into your community," he said. "If everybody did that, the world would be a lot better."

— by Pamela Lannom

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