

The Many “Flavors” of Mark Schroeder

When asking the Chief Financial Officer Mark Schroeder for this interview, he was reluctant because he said he’s just “plain vanilla” and lives a dull life.

Not true, says his daughter Amy. “My dad cannot possibly be the ‘vanilla’ person he claims to be. First of all, he loves chocolate, but more importantly he possesses many unique attributes as a person.”



Attribute 1: Principles

Mark grew up as an Army Brat. His dad was a surgical technician in the Army. As a youngster, Mark lived seven or eight years in Europe, specifically Landstuhl, Germany, and Orleans, France. He also lived at several Army bases in the United States.



The Schroeder Family

While growing up, Mark developed his love of sports. Mark said, “You play lots of sports when you have four brothers and one sister.” The siblings were born about two years apart with Mark being the second oldest. Their dad also coached a baseball team. At one point, the team was one game away from beating the French team who would have traveled to the United States to play in the Little League World Series. Unfortunately, they lost. Mark was the batboy for the team.

Mark moved to Colorado after his father suffered a heart attack while operating on a wounded soldier in Vietnam. He was sent to Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Aurora to recuperate. The family stayed. His father continued in the Army working as a medical surgical technician.

Unfortunately, he died when Mark was finishing high school. His mom and siblings still live in the Denver metro area.

The family moved to Colorado when Mark was in the eighth grade. He graduated from Aurora Hinkley High School where he played football and baseball. He initially started college at Western State College, but transferred after a year. Mark graduated from Metropolitan State College (Denver) in the mid-1970s with a double degree in marketing and management. At one point, he thought he might pursue a career in advertising, but decided he wouldn’t fit in as he dislikes (still does) off-color advertising, and that style was becoming the norm. Mark also envisioned opening and managing a tennis facility. He quickly realized he didn’t have the money to make this happen. Mark developed an interest in the game when he was in high school; he developed his skill in his quest to beat his older brother in tennis. While he didn’t play on school teams, he was competitive in college intramurals. In fact, he taught tennis while a freshman in college. He still tries to play an occasional game.



Attribute 2: Career commitment

Mark went to work for Denver Arena Concessions, where he started by counting cash and working in the cash room. He left for another job opportunity with Leisure Food Service. After that didn't work out, he pursued a position with ARA (now Aramark). To get the "inside information" about the job and the company, he called Kevin McNicholas whom he knew of through industry involvement. As they talked, Kevin offered Mark a job with KM Concessions, and graciously gave him the upcoming Fourth of July weekend off. Mark reported to work on July 5, 1982.



Like many other KM/SSA employees, Mark puts in his time working at the Stock Show. When he first started with the company, he would work from early morning to late at night doing what needed to be done: running the register, counting money, etc. Mark, like every other KM family member, still devotes the month of January to the Stock Show operations and works whatever hours necessary to complete the task.

Before being named Chief Financial Officer, Mark was involved with re-doing the accounting systems and installing a computer system. He shared that the staff thought they were in hog heaven when they got their first 13.1mb computer. Now he claims he has files bigger than that!



With 23 years of working at the same company, Mark has many



stories. One story involved a meeting held in the offices housed in the train station inside the Denver Zoo. Mark described the office as "problematic" as natural zoo "pests" regularly inhabited the space. Kevin tried to control the rodent problem by putting a sticky mouse glue trap on the back of the office couch. As the meeting with a group of bankers to discuss a potential loan got underway, one of the bankers sat on the couch. This particular banker was a female with long hair. And, yes . . . her hair got stuck in the mouse glue trap. Kevin ended up cutting off a chunk of her hair to release the glue trap. Mark laughingly said they didn't get the loan from that bank.

His daughter claims that Mark is a problem solver. You can explain a situation, and Mark will identify at least two plausible solutions. Amy said he uses this skill as well as a compulsive need to take care of all he is entrusted by KM Concessions, making him a good CFO. Amy also emphasized her father is a man of deep integrity who would much rather fail than even come close to lying.

Mark echoed this philosophy when he said that Kevin knows he hasn't taken a penny that's not his. Unfortunately, he realizes the world's become a tough place and not everyone is that honest. "You have to be a realist when working with people." However, Mark believes you can become too cynical and end up not trusting anyone, which isn't good either.

Attribute 3: Family devotion

While Mark keeps busy at work managing the financial affairs for KM/SSA, he also takes time to be with his family.

Mark is much more than just a family man; his family is his life. According to his daughter, he's the kind of husband that goes on walks with his wife even though he doesn't like walking, and he'll go out at 11 at night to put gas in his wife's car so she doesn't have to fill it up on a snowy morning.



While in college, Mark met his wife, Cheryl, at a weekly Christian fellowship program for college students, which was held at Glasiers Barn in then east Denver. After Mark saw Cheryl, he knew he wanted to get to know her better. As a fellowship leader, he was able to influence what group he lead, and

he easily joined her group. Interestingly, Cheryl was Mark's sister roommate when she attended University of Northern Colorado and later was a roommate of a woman who later married one of Mark's brothers. Both women wanted to introduce Mark to Cheryl, but he beat them to it. Mark and Cheryl married in 1981.



Cheryl graduated with a teaching degree and taught for a few years before marrying Mark. However, Mark said she didn't enjoy teaching, as it wasn't what she had hoped. They both shared the belief that they were going to raise their children and not send them to daycare if they could. When their son, Jon, was born, Cheryl stayed home. Jon was soon joined by Amy, then Allison. After the children started school, Cheryl started working at their church in its children's ministry program. Today she's a mentor with Lifetouch, America's leading school photographer. The job is perfect for Cheryl, as she loves photography.

His son, Jon, is a junior at Baylor University (Waco, Texas) where he's studying journalism. Jon recently was in charge of the school's homecoming parade. Mark fears that Jon's classes may have suffered with this important responsibility, but he quickly added that John gained invaluable experience. Laughingly he shared Jon got his first "C" ever in a Spanish class. His daughter Amy is a freshman at Whitworth College (Spokane, WA). The youngest, Allison, is a junior at D'Evelyn High School.



Mark said proudly that all three of his kids love to read, and they're all smart. He added that Cheryl is responsible for that genetic trait as he claims he's not very bright. However, many might disagree with that belief.

The Schroeder Family

Amy shared that her dad truly knows all of his kids and loves spending time with them. “He is there for the quiet moments at home where we became who we really are as well as the big events good parents are required to attend,” she said. For example, Amy said her dad has helped her study for tests until two in the morning many times and sat through five-hour gymnastic meets even when she and her sister were not very good by anyone’s standards.



Mark proudly stated that he or Cheryl or both have attended 99% of their children’s school and sporting events. And that’s not a minor accomplishment as all the children have been involved in many school activities.

A proud papa believes in his kids. While in high school, Jon was active in cross-country, track and soccer as well as being a National Merit Finalist, and Amy participated in volleyball, dramatics and was class president. Allison, as a high school junior, is following the footsteps of her siblings by running track, playing volleyball and acting in school plays. All three children attend or have graduated from D’Evelyn Junior/Senior School, which is a liberal arts public school in the Jeffco School District.

Attribute 4: Religious and moral values

His relationship with GOD is very important to Mark. Daughter Amy said Mark possesses the unique gift of a desire to help those in need. The family belongs to Trinity Baptist Church. Mark used his gift with finances to serve as the church treasurer and Board Member for the last 15 years. This year Mark stepped down because he needed a break.



The Schroeder youngsters Mark’s church. Through playing basketball, playing games and then feeding the youngsters – all while listening and talking, Mark believes he’s making a difference. Then on Sunday evenings, at AWANA, Mark shares the gospel with kids in kindergarten through grade two while playing games, talking and learning Bible verses. He said these kids are like sponges as they learn the verses, and they know what they mean.

Every Friday night, Mark works with teenagers from underprivileged families in hopes that they will have the opportunity to live better lives. The program, Community Youth Night, is partially sponsored by



Mark (center) stands proudly with his church group.

It’s obvious that Mark brings his morals and values into all facets of his life. For example, Mark doesn’t cuss. His daughter said she has never heard him swear not even when he taught her to drive.

Amy enjoys her father's sense of humor and foresight. She claims that her dad can always predict the endings of movies and make waiters or waitresses laugh with his stupid jokes.

While Mark may not have a favorite movie, song or television show, he definitely is not "plain vanilla." Amy summed it up well when she said "vanilla" people plod through life blandly nodding and never really changing anything in this world. However, if you ask anyone, she said, that knows her dad; you will see he in no way fits that description. Amy added, "My father is one of the most selfless people I've ever known and cares very deeply for those he considers his family, whether they are actually related to him or not."



Daughter Amy

NOTE: On her own initiative, Amy wrote and sent an e-mail praising her dad and sharing recollections about her dad. They undoubtedly share a special bond as her dad delivered her at home because Cheryl couldn't make it to the hospital in time.

When Cheryl realized her baby was coming, she called Mark at work and asked him to come home NOW. Mark recalls that he made the normal 30-minute trip in less than 15 minutes. Realizing that he didn't have time to take his wife to the hospital, Mark called 911. While the emergency vehicles were enroute to the Schroeder home, Amy arrived.



Mark with daughter Amy