



Looking Back

Steve Ireson

steps in putting together the Green Energy Act.

I figured that if I'm going to take a course on renewable energy, I should talk to someone that knows about it. At the time George Smitherman was the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. I'd known George for many years, so I reached out to him and we met for coffee. I picked his brain and he could see I was really excited, so he offered for me to come and work in the office with him at Queen's Park until starting school in the fall. I'll tell you, it was a really steep learning curve, but I learned a lot.

I ended up not going to school, but staying with the Ministry and becoming an MPP liaison, a point person dealing with MPPs and constituency offices. This took me on a more political tangent than where I'd been originally headed, but also laid the groundwork for things to come. I was there until a couple months after George left to run for Mayor of Toronto, when I too left and joined his campaign team. It was just as eye-opening as Queens Park—I'd never even followed municipal politics before!

The way I looked at this whole thing was, okay I didn't end up going to school to study renewable energy as I was planning, but I took this whole experience as two years of training and learned a whole lot and made an incredible number of contacts.

Once that wrapped up, I connected again with the Ontario Sustainable Energy Association, which was where I'd started off volunteering in the beginning of this whole career change. It all came full circle, and I've been with them for the last year helping with environmental initiatives and education across the province. Though my contract is up and I'm looking for new challenges and opportunities, I've realized just how important the environment and our interactions with it are, and will bring this mindset to whatever comes next.

If you've ever been out dancing at a club in Toronto, chances are you've been to one of Steve Ireson's events. GoGo, Oz, Industry, It's a Boy's Life, 5ive and CIRCA: he's run 'em all. Switching gears to his childhood passion—championing the environment—has been a breath of fresh air. Catch up with him at steveireson.com.

I was already over the night club business when Peter Gaiten approached me back when he was first getting CIRCA going, and he was a hard man to say no to. When he finally got the liquor license many months later, I ended up going to work with him after all. When things at CIRCA fell apart though, I didn't want to go back into the same vein I'd been in. Having done it for 20 years, I was tired of it and it wasn't fun anymore. I had a real desire for change.

I got to thinking, Oh my God, now what? I need a new career! This was all just after my 40th birthday and when you've done one thing—well a bunch of different things, but all within the entertainment and hospitality industry—it's quite a challenge to up and change careers. You really question whether you *can* do it.

I figured if I'm really going to do this, I'll need some help. I went to career counselling and it was then that I started to realize it wasn't as scary as I'd first thought. When you really look at the things you've done, you start to see that the skills you've learned over the years can be applied to other fields. I've always had a very deep passion for the environment—ever since I was a kid. It was in Scouts and when I was a camp counsellor where I really developed my passion for the outdoors and nature, but even before that, every summer I was always up north in Muskoka with my family. So I guess my whole nightclub career was a bit of a side-track.

While trying to figure out what direction to go with my life, I decided that I would take advantage of the government's Second Careers program and return to school. Chris [my husband] and I were looking online and stumbled on a course at Humber College around renewable energy and sustainable building that got my interest. Ever since I was a kid I also had a curiosity about energy and infrastructure, like where are those hydro wires going? I even used to make little projects with solar cells, lights and motors. It sparked the idea that this direction touched on many of my core beliefs and interests. It's also where the planet and society needs to be going considering fossil fuels poison our environment and are a finite resource. At the time the Ontario government was making some big