

Of Boots and Business

L.L. Bean's Shawn Gorman '89 talks UNH, his favorite outdoor places and the product he just had to say 'no' to

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Shawn Gorman '89 is just the third chairman in the 103-year history of L.L. Bean, legendary retailer of everything from fly-fishing rods to flannel pajamas and the uber-popular L.L. Bean Boots.

Great-grandson of company founder Leon Leonwood Bean, Gorman never thought he'd end up working in the family business, but returned to it in 1992, working in a variety of roles at the company. Since taking over as chairman of the board in 2013, he's overseen the expansion of Bean's brand, including the opening of four new retail stores,

and continued the push to get Bean products into new customers' homes—all while maintaining the company's commitment to its existing customer base.

UNH Magazine sat down with Gorman at the L.L. Bean headquarters in Maine to talk about his passions and his UNH experience, and we even got a tour of the Bean archives. Check out our Q&A with Gorman:

Be honest: Have you ever gone the easy route and given an L.L. Bean gift card as a gift?

Oh, I suppose I have. But it's kind of fun to go up and shop and find gifts that you think your friends and family would like — and then find out they actually do.

Is there an idea that someone pitched as a new product that you just said "heck no" to?

Ah, yes — the trailer-hitch mounted porta-potty. It probably has a purpose, but it didn't seem like a good product for L.L. Bean.

Is there a product that surprised you with its popularity?

My brother introduced a cold-weather hunting suit that's essentially like a sleeping bag with arms, so when you're up in a stand and it's subzero and you're idle for a long time, you can stay warm. We put it into the catalog, and not only did hunters want them, but they really caught on as the ultimate stadium jacket to wear to Patriots games.

Want to Know More?

Check out the [feature story](#) from *UNH Magazine*.

What's your favorite memory from your time at UNH?

It's hard to pinpoint one particular thing. I love the campus location, and spent a lot of times outdoors, which was great. I guess I'd say mostly dorm life in Lord Hall, and the lifelong friends I made. Lord was an all-male dorm, and it was exactly how you'd imagine an all-guys dorm to be — so much fun. I met my very best friends in life there.

What's your must-have outdoor accessory?

I'd have to say this vest I'm wearing today (points to his PrimaLoft vest by L.L. Bean). It's a new product and it's great.

You're an avid outdoorsman. Where is your favorite outdoor spot in New England?

For hiking, it would be Bigelow Range in Carrabasset Valley. The hike is beautiful, and the reward from the top is gorgeous because you're overlooking Flagstaff Lake. It's in the western Maine mountains, which are really my favorite place on earth.

L.L. Bean will take back anything at any time, pretty much for any reason — a return policy that sets the company apart from other retailers. What's one of the more interesting finds from your returns department? Our return policy is a big reason behind our long-term success. One woman returned her husband's Bean Boots. We realized this must have been his money storage place — there was maybe \$4,000 in the toe of one boot. We called her up and said, "We've got these boots and we'll take

them back, but we want you to know you've got about \$4,000 here." Needless to say, she was pretty surprised.

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