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Family focus

HAVING TAKEN OVER FOR HIS FATHER, **MITCHELL WARREN** AIMS TO EXPAND THE LASALLE GROUP WHILE KEEPING ITS FAMILY ATMOSPHERE

Last year, at age 28, Mitchell Warren took the helm of The LaSalle Group, the \$30 million real estate company his father started in 1990. After graduating from the University of Michigan with a bachelor's degree in political science in 2002, Warren went to work full time at the family business, which by then had narrowed its focus to real estate services for its assisted-living facilities, Autumn Oaks, and its memory-care facilities, Autumn Leaves. Warren joined the company in 1999 as an intern. Since then, he has helped LaSalle grow from a small company, which opened its first assisted-living facility in 2000 with only a handful of employees, to a company with 375 employees and 11 properties in Illinois and Texas. Warren was interviewed by staff writer Shashana Pearson Hormillosa.

DESCRIBE YOUR FAMILY. I got married last year. My wife is Kelli, a teacher in Southlake. We're members of First Baptist Church in Coppell.

WHERE WERE YOU BORN AND RAISED? Lansing, Mich.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE CHILDHOOD MEMORY? My grandparents would take us

every year for a week to Higgins Lake in Northern Michigan.

WHAT'S THE CRAZIEST THING YOU'VE DONE? I've gone paragliding with my sister in Utah.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT LIVING IN DALLAS? All the stuff there is to do. I love the restaurants and the people. I love the big city. It's always kind of a thrill that you're living by the big city.

HOW DID YOU GET TO WHERE YOU ARE NOW?

I grew up in the business. Even when my dad had the company in Chicago, I would visit him at work. Being in a family business, it's your whole life. In college, I came down here and interned in 1999 and 2001, and in 2002, I came down here to work full time. I started out in owners' representation and construction management. After a year, I came to work at the corporate office in Arlington, where I started in development

and did everything—from concept to when construction starts. At the time, we also did financing, so I would

help find financing for the projects. I did that for a couple of years and then became vice president of development with two people under me. I served as vice president of development for five years and became president in 2008, when my father stepped down and became chairman of the company.

WHAT'S THE SCARIEST PART OF TAKING OVER THAT ROLE FOR YOUR FATHER? Having other people rely on you is the scariest part. We run this as a family business. Taking care of our residents and their families and taking care of our employees and their families. That's been ingrained in us, so there's a lot of pressure there.

WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU LEARNED EARLY IN YOUR CAREER THAT YOU CONTINUE TO USE TODAY? I've learned that I'm not always right and that I have to listen to everyone's opinion and make decisions based on what is good for everyone. Being a young person, I really do have to listen to people who are older and wiser, who have been in their fields for some time and really excel in them.

WHAT'S THE BEST ADVICE YOU'VE RECEIVED? My mother taught me to know when to open my mouth and when not to. I've been told that my words can be my greatest asset and also my biggest weakness.

WHAT IS YOUR PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT? I'm a Christian, and I was saved about five or six years ago and that's my main focus. The second is my wife, being fortunate that God made us for each other and paired us together. Professionally, I didn't plan on becoming the leader of this company. I think it's God's plan, and hopefully it's an accomplishment for Him.

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR BEST BUSINESS DECISION? It's the people I brought on to the team that I've surrounded myself with, because they've allowed us to be successful and grow and sustain ourselves during this recession.

WHAT KEEPS YOU AWAKE AT NIGHT? Lately, worrying about the economy, not as much for us or our operating business, but just for the future of our growth and being able to hold all the pieces together and keep everyone deployed.

HOW HAVE YOU BEEN AFFECTED BY THE DOWN ECONOMY? We are doing quite well, especially our properties. That's our bread and butter. We have a 96.5% occupancy rate. The way the economy has affected us is with new properties. We are still expanding because of the demand, but it's harder. We're not growing as fast as we thought — because it's harder to get financing — but we are growing.

HOW ARE YOU GROWING NOW? We have one Autumn Leaves property under construction in Fort Worth, one in development in Denton and one in development in Houston. We hope to start construction on that one in the third quarter. In Chicago, we have two properties. One is almost full, and the other is half full.

HOW WILL YOU CONTINUE TO GROW? We probably won't do another market after Houston until 2010. We want to expand to areas where we can have several facilities. It allows you to build your name up in the community. The more properties, the better that is. We're looking at large metropolitan areas where supply and demand is good.

WHAT DO YOU TELL YOUR EMPLOYEES TO LEAD AND INSPIRE THEM AND KEEP THEM MOTIVATED DURING THIS ECONOMIC TIME? We just communicate and keep people up to date with the facts we have. We have a great story to tell in that we have a lot of positives. For us it's a matter of when, not if, so when the credit crunch eases up, we will be one of the first people to get financing because we have a great product. I stay pretty positive with them. I'm pretty optimistic in general.

WHAT IS THE BEST PERK OF YOUR JOB? The fact that we're giving back and helping the community. I also get time to think about new ideas and to be creative.

