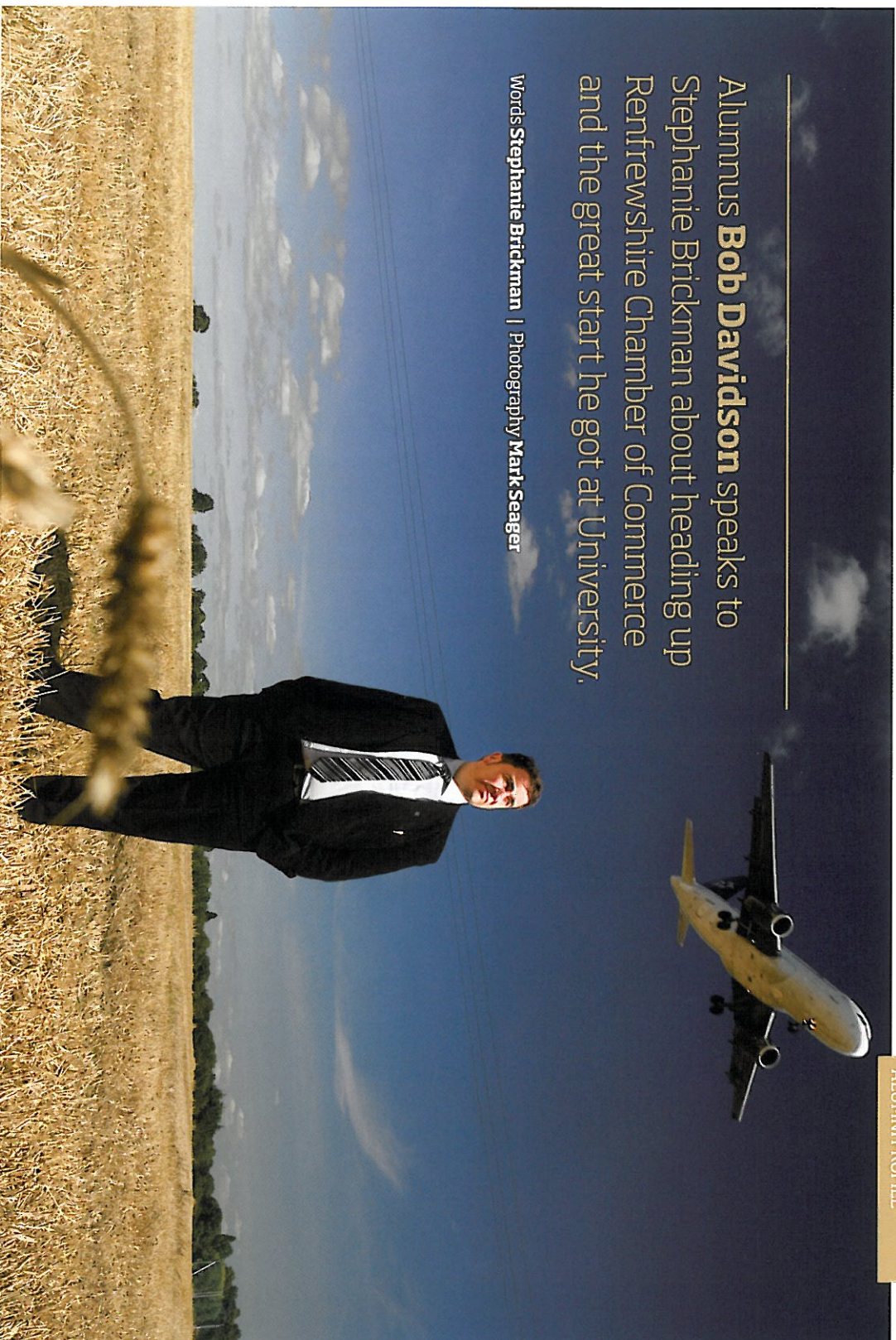


Alumnus **Bob Davidson** speaks to Stephanie Brickman about heading up Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce and the great start he got at University.

Words **Stephanie Brickman** | Photography **Mark Seager**



Common Sense and Contacts

When Bob Davidson says he started out life as a BABE, he doesn't mean quite what you might think. Back in 1990, when he went to Paisley College of Technology, as it was known then (now UWS), it stood for a BA in Business Economics.

Twenty years later, he's just completed his first year as Chief Executive of Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce, a year that has seen him turn the Renfrewshire Chamber's fortunes around. It's just one of the many achievements Bob has under his belt, and he remains adamant that his studies are still underpinning his success.

"One of the best parts of my experience on my course was definitely the year out," he explains. "It was a sandwich course with an industrial placement. I spent a year with Chivas, the drinks company. It was a springboard for me into the drinks industry, where I spent 18 years and worked my way up to Director level."

On graduating, Bob took up a position with drinks company Whyte and Mackay that lasted 7 years working for his old boss who had moved from Chivas. Then followed 6 years at Diageo, an MBA and a great deal of travel. After a brief spell with Sky TV, 2 years in the construction sector, Bob then worked in drinks consulting and latterly Forth Wines, which was led by the guy who had been his boss on his

year out from University a couple of decades earlier.

"Without a doubt my contacts from my student days were paying off. This is my 9th job, some would say that's great, but some would say – why don't you stay? It can be a good thing, it's lots of experience. Over half of these jobs came from my network, all related to that first year out."

It was a contact made from the drinks industry who encouraged Bob to take up the position as Chief Executive of Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce, which had been underperforming. Membership was down, team morale was low and it was losing money. Now, at the end of Bob's first financial year, figures show the Chamber making a healthy surplus, with membership, morale and profile at an all time high.

"It was just good old common sense," says Bob. "It's the number one thing I look for. I got a strategy together, got the team and the Board of the Chamber to support it and that's what we're delivering just now. It worked and it worked very quickly."

Thanks to Bob's strategy, the Chamber now has an improved online directory, and revamped and better attended events. Press coverage of the Chamber has increased with a business page in the local paper The Gazette, as well

as regular coverage in The Herald and Evening Times. The Chamber is also prevalent across all social media platforms and has recently launched the first Chamber of Commerce iPhone app in Europe.

Bob feels the Chamber has a particularly important role to play in the current economic climate.

"We've tailored our events to cover themes that will help our members conduct business in difficult times. Sometimes tough times mean opportunity, perhaps reduced competition in the marketplace? We also offer various marketing channels to our members, we're always saying if you've got something good to say, shout about it!"

Bob is also keen to urge alumni to join, saying: "Our strapline is 'To help business in Renfrewshire grow and prosper' and that's just what we do."

Alumni interested in joining Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce can call **0141 847 5455** or visit www.renfrewshirechamber.com

For details on all Scottish Chambers visit www.scottishchambers.org.uk