

## Features

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## Marvin J. Girouard A Man and a Mission

*By Alycia Zuehlke*

It seems stereotypical that you would see a high-ranking CEO cruising the streets of Dallas, looking like James Bond in his Aston Martin. But Mays graduate Marvin J. Girouard '61, a 2002 Distinguished Alumnus of Texas A&M and a 1995 Mays Outstanding Alumni Award recipient, is anything but the norm.

In 2004, Girouard received the United States Fund for UNICEF's second ever Lifetime Achievement Award from the first winner of the award, journalist Hugh Downs, in honor of the Mays Alum's many contributions to the children's aid effort. Girouard said he and his wife have both given their time and effort to aid UNICEF.



"I feel honored," Girouard says. "We have been involved every year, but the main reason is that when people think of Pier 1, they think of me. What I do personally and professionally runs together."

Girouard's company, Pier 1 Imports, has contributed almost \$2 million to the UNICEF cause in the past 20 years through the 100 percent proceed donations of UNICEF greeting cards and other items sold in Pier 1 stores. When he is not running around the world on behalf of Pier 1, Girouard spends time lending personal and professional support to charitable organizations like UNICEF, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, and United Way.

"I think it is good that companies give back to the communities that they serve," Girouard explains. "I think it makes the customers feel good that we are doing things that they approve of."

Texas born and raised, Girouard grew up in Port Arthur before he attended Texas A&M University. After receiving a BBA in marketing in 1961, he served five years in the U.S. Navy, where he was stationed in California and had tours of duty in Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam. Upon returning to civilian life, he married a Texas girl and moved to Dallas to start his business career.

Girouard went to work for Pier 1 in 1975 and visited Communist China soon after President Nixon helped open the country to international trade.

"I was one of the first American businessmen to travel into China where I bought merchandise for our company," Girouard says. "It was an incredible experience and has continued to grow. We now buy things from all over the world. I wanted to be in marketing and Pier 1 was a Texas-based company. That was important to me because I wanted to live in Texas and nowhere else."

In his nearly 30 years at Pier 1, Girouard has been chairman and CEO for almost six years, president for 12 years and head of marketing, logistics and merchandising before that. Today Girouard, a man whose name seems synonymous with exotic places, admits that he has always loved to travel. Those travels eventually got him interested in international aid.

"When I traveled to any third-world country, I recognized that the children were the ones who always had the least," recalls Girouard. "Women and children in many foreign countries have not been given a fair chance to succeed, and I think we have the opportunity and obligation to help their cause."

Twenty years later, the alliance Pier 1 has forged with UNICEF has worked many miracles and won the interest of celebrities, such as Meg Ryan, and hundreds of children who participate in UNICEF's Christmas Greeting Card contest, thought up by Girouard.

"It has been great for our company and a lot of people embrace it because I'm involved with it," Girouard says. "It also has been good for UNICEF. Now with the tsunami disaster UNICEF has really come to the forefront along with the American Red Cross – and Pier 1 has again helped by donating more than \$200,000 to assist those in need."

Reminiscing about his years of work with Pier 1, Girouard comments, "It's been a great ride."

And the Aston Martin? He has only put 500 miles on it since he bought the car a year ago. He says he still finds it "exciting to travel around the world, but it is also nice to come home." @