

# FAMILY GUY

Mickey MacDonald talks about his mom, his wife, his kids, siblings, extended relations—and a bit about business

BY DAWN CHAFE

The conversation didn't go the way I expected.

As the 'Where Are they Now' title of this department suggests, the interview was intended to touch base/get-up-to-speed with Mickey MacDonald regarding his activities over the dozen years since he was inducted into *Atlantic Business Magazine's* Top 50 CEO Hall of Fame. In 2006, he was the CEO of Atlantic Mobility Products as well as the president and CEO of MICCO Companies with interests in transportation and warehousing; real estate, rental and leasing; and wholesale trade. At the time, he hinted at possible partnerships that would push his annual sales over the \$500 million mark.

I thought that this call, on a glorious autumn day punctuated by kaleidoscopic seasonal colour, would take up where we'd left off. And it did—sort of. He quickly bounced through his 2007 purchase and 2012 sale of iconic Halifax retailer Mills Brothers; his purchase, that same nostalgic year, of another Nova Scotia landmark and Canada's oldest drive-in, The Chickenburger; his 2011 buy-out of Glenn Cooke's (of Cooke Aquaculture) shares in Clearwater (Mickey, brother Colin and John Risley now own 60 per cent of the company); the addition of Harvest Wines and Spirits (think importation and distribution) to the MICCO fold; the founding/closing/evolution of Palooka's Boxing Club for at-risk youth into Palooka's Charitable Foundation and Palooka's Executive Fitness; and his founding (in partnership with Container World) of RSL Regional Storage and Logistics.

Is he still involved in real estate? "Yeah, I have a number of projects and companies." What about Atlantic Mobility Products? "I sold it to Bell in 2006, bought it back in 2010." Any other new investments? "Sure, I'm always interested in exploring opportunities."

What about that 2014 charity sparring match with Justin Trudeau? Surely that stands out as a highlight moment? "I'll give it to the guy, he has guts. Every time you step into the ring, you expect to take a punch in the face. He's a pretty good boxer and he trained hard, but this old guy still had a few tricks up his sleeve." (Mickey, for those not in the know, is a lifetime boxer who credits the sport for giving him his competitive business focus.)

All of his responses are polite and succinct—until I ask the magic question: what's your greatest accomplishment? "My family," he says with obvious pride. By family, he means his wife Stephanie ("We've been together 29 years. I don't know why she's wasting her life with me, but I'm grateful."), his kids, his siblings and their families, and his parents, both now deceased.

When I comment about how unusual it is for a businessman to be so eager to talk about family in an interview about his professional accomplishments, Mickey puts me on hold to text me pictures of his office. Behind his computer, more than a hundred overlapping snapshots create a warming personal mosaic while a significant number of framed photos of varying sizes decorate the surrounding office walls. Family, he maintains, is what life's all about—even his business life.

In fact, he credits his mother (a woman of "indomitable spirit" who raised seven children while also holding down a demanding job as head nurse of the neonatal unit at the Halifax Infirmary) for inspiring his work ethic. "She taught me to appreciate a job and to not be afraid of hard work. I've noticed over the years that when something looks like it's going to take a lot of hard work, that's where I usually find my biggest opportunities."

As for his next big adventure, he says it's already underway. "Watching my children grow, having the opportunity to work with them and see them prepare to take over what I started—there's nothing more rewarding than that."

## FEEDBACK

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## 5 FUN FACTS



**Mickey likes to celebrate holidays** by hosting his extended family for supper. "We'll have 30 to 40 people in the room over our garage. Everyone brings something. I'll do the ham, potatoes and carrots."

**When he asked his wife Stephanie** if they could have another child after the birth of their daughter Sophie (6), she gave him a girl—a Portuguese Water dog.

**His mother, Belle MacDonald** (née Carnell), was born and raised on tiny Perry's Island—a 4 sq. mile spot of land in Notre Dame Bay, N.L., just south of Fogo Island.

**He has given over \$10 million to various community organizations.** "I don't know what I've done to be so blessed. I'm proud to be able to help those less fortunate."

**About helping brother Colin and John Risley launch Clearwater:**

"I had a five tonne truck and I drove to Grand Manan to pick up their first load of lobster. We brought it back to my basement apartment and we cooked them all there in one night. I swear I can still smell lobsters up around Armdale."



The captain and his crew

(l-r) Stephanie, Sophie, Bella Rose, Mickey, Colin and Johnny