

NOVEMBER 2020

NEIGHBOURS

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A TASTE FOR
ENTREPRENEURIALISM

TRACIE MICHAUD & FAMILY

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A Taste for Entrepreneurialism

Tracie Michaud & Family

By Deborah Everest-Hill

Photo by Marcus Armstrong

Tracie Michaud spent 30 years leading sales teams in the financial services industry before she decided to make her quality of life a priority and pursue her dream of becoming an entrepreneur. "I had been living a very stressed-out and overwhelmed life in the corporate world and for years it had been taking a significant toll on my emotional, physical and mental health," Tracie says. "I was constantly craving more calm and simplicity in my life, but it always seemed out of reach because we were so busy with work, travel, kids and all their activities."

Tracie says regular tea breaks helped her relax during those difficult days in the corporate world and so when she thought of starting a business, she thought about tea. "The peace and serenity that comes from making and enjoying a great cup of tea became the vision for starting my business. I wanted to share that same feeling with other stressed out and overwhelmed women."

So, three years ago at the age of 48, Tracie left her job as vice president of national sales to establish a luxury tea company, Tea with Tracie. "When I started brainstorming about all of the things in my life that I truly loved, I kept coming back to tea. I've been a lifelong tea lover - never had a cup of coffee - so for me, tea has always been a calming and relaxing part of each day, my liquid therapy."

Now more than two years into her tea business, Tracie says the experience has been life-changing for her and the rest of the family. She is a certified tea sommelier through the Tea and Herbal Association of Canada and business has continued to grow. She had several events planned this year, which were unfortunately cancelled due to the pandemic, but her online sales grew. She thinks



"people sought out warm cups of tea for comfort" during this stressful and unprecedented time. "Throughout my life, everything was solved by talking to my mom over a cup of tea."

The company was already offering free local delivery before the pandemic so it was well-positioned for that aspect of the move to social distancing. Deliveries were originally managed by Tracie's father Bill but once the pandemic developed, he was encouraged to stay home while husband Mark took over.

Mark represents wine and spirit companies at the LCBO but this business was, of course, on hold for a few months, freeing him up to help Tracie with the business. During this time, Tracie also had the opportunity to develop a customer loyalty program earlier than expected. The couple hopes Mark can retire from his current job to join the tea business full time in a year or so.

Mark was born near Quebec City and moved to Oakville when he was 9-years-old. He was heavily involved in sports and was fortunate to play both competitive baseball and hockey. When he was 19, he had a decision to make and opted for a career as a goalie with the NCAA to play at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. He then played in the minor leagues in Canada

and the United States before returning to Oakville to start a full-time career.

At first, he worked for a large corporate wine company as a sales representative but he, too, craved a more independent and entrepreneurial work arrangement. So after 20 years he also became self-employed and is now a wine and spirits consultant for several agencies.

Tracie is an Oakville native who was fortunate to have a busy, loving and fun-filled childhood. "My childhood was very active and filled with lots of love and family time. We always had a full house with tons of kids around."

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Tracie's mom and dad, Carolyn and Bill Booth, fostered children for the Halton Children's Aid Society for more than 40 years beginning the commitment when Tracie was only a toddler. "They helped more than 120 children during that time. Some stayed for only a few hours or a few days and some stayed for years," Tracie says. "We were brought up to show love and kindness to everyone who entered our home and it really taught me and my two younger brothers to be extremely grateful and appreciative of having such a loving and stable family life, because so many children don't."

Tracie's mother ran a home daycare business and her dad worked as a typesetter with a printing company in Toronto. When he retired, he operated a small printing business from home so the concept of working according to your own terms was something Tracie was exposed to early on. Her grandfather Olaf also lived with the family so, the house was usually noisy, busy, filled with kids and lots of laughter. Tracie also has fond memories of regular camping trips to provincial parks and KOA campgrounds from May until October each year.

Mark and Tracie met at Thomas A. Blakelock Secondary School. She was in Grade 9 and he was in Grade 10. "I had a huge crush on him from the first day of high school," Tracie admits, but it wasn't until years later that they started dating. The couple celebrated their 26th wedding anniversary this year and they dated for five years before that so like other high school sweethearts, they have known and loved one another for most of their lives. Today, the family consists of son David, age 17, and a daughter Faith, age 16.

David is in Grade 12 and Faith is in Grade 9 at Abbey Park High School. There are also two border terrier cousins in the family named Cayman and Tetley. "We've always had dogs and love having two at the same time," Mark says, "So they can play and snuggle together when we're all busy."

During the past ten years, life for the Michaud family has revolved around David and Faith's activities as well as Mark's involvement

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with coaching or assisting with many of the kids' teams. Like his father, David has played Rep baseball and hockey since he was young and completed his final season with the Ontario Royals last year. Being on the team allowed him to travel to Florida for Spring Break training and throughout the US for tournaments in the Summer. Mark and Grandpa joined him, cheering him on at every game.

David played hockey for his high school team and Tracie says between playing and training for baseball all year and playing hockey in the Winter, there wasn't much time left outside of work and regular life. Faith, too, is active. She danced for several years and developed a love for soccer in the past few years. She is also a "master jigsaw puzzler" according to Mark and loves building Lego and playing Minecraft.

With entrepreneurialism in the family, it's also not surprising that David felt the urge to come up with a business idea. As part of the Halton Region Summer Company Program, he launched a mobile auto-detailing business, Detailing Done Right (DDR) in May. With the help of a grant and training, he has been working hard to build the business during the pandemic and has secured client work since he launched. "He's pursuing his passion for the automotive field and we are so proud of all his hard work," Mark says.

When they are not busy with activities and work, the Michaud family loves to have movie nights, visit friends and family, relax by the backyard pool or travel to new and interesting places. "Last year, we did a great trip to Nashville and had a fun-filled time with so many cool adventures," Tracie says.

The family loves living in Oakville and both Tracie and Mark have opted to get involved and make a difference in the community. The couple has donated its time and resources to The Lighthouse for Grieving Children, Oakville Hospital Foundation, the St. Andrew's Christmas House Tour, and Tracie is a member of 100 Women Who Care Oakville. They have also done what they can to support the fight against breast



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cancer and since Tracie started the tea business, she has found a way to share her passion for tea while giving back.

She held a Tea for Ta-tas afternoon tea party event during the first two years she was in business and last year, Tracie partnered with CIBC in Hamilton, Burlington and Oakville to support their fundraising campaign. She has also created a local fundraising program to enable schools, teams and groups to raise money by selling her tea.

Tracie recently launched a new tea called "Think Pink" with a portion of proceeds from every pouch to support local programs and services. This year, the money will be donated to The Healing Journey Program at Wellspring Birmingham Gilgan House. "All of my friends who've been touched by cancer have benefited from the programs and services provided by Wellspring," Tracie says, "it's a wonderful and supportive resource for cancer patients and their caregivers in Oakville."

Since starting her tea business, Tracie has discovered her passion for sharing her love of tea with others and this has enabled her to do things she didn't have time to do before. "It's a chance to give back locally and support the causes near and dear to my heart."

Tracie credits her parents, Bill and Carolyn, for her work ethic, sense of humour and desire to give back. "They raised me to be kind, generous and honest, work hard, put my best effort into whatever I was doing, and constantly self-assess so I could celebrate the things I'd done well and determine what could be done differently next time."

Bill and Carolyn only live three minutes away so they are part of the family's daily routine. Tracie's 96-year-old grandma Louise also lives in Oakville so the support of family has been a constant for Tracie and Mark throughout all life's ups and downs. "They taught me to laugh during the good times and the bad," she says. "These are all things we try to instill in our children every day and they hear it from all four of us regularly so hopefully, it's sinking in."

At *Neighbours*, we believe everyone has a story to tell. Get in touch to share yours or nominate someone for a feature article by emailing deveresthill@bestversionmedia.com.



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