

Hamburger Hotshot

Delaware's largest McDonald's franchisee is using his scale for good

BY JENNY HOWARD





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FOR DECADES, our locally owned and operated McDonald's restaurants on Delmarva have served customers delicious, high-quality menu items in a convenient and comfortable environment. Seeing those Golden Arches brings back the nostalgia for us all. We still long for the welcoming McDonald's experience we celebrated in our childhood all those years ago when our parents would treat us to a Happy Meal after a big game, a Saturday morning pancake breakfast, or an ice cream cone you 'had to have' after school! McDonald's holds those memories for nearly each and every one of us in some way.

And while the menu may have changed throughout those years, their founding principles have not: satisfy each and every customer, respect your employees, and give back to your communities.

Our local McDonald's are part of the fabric of our community. They are the sponsors of little leagues teams, the supporters of our health care heroes, and the local business owners who make it their mission to be involved in each and every community in which their restaurants operate.

'They' are Mike Meoli and The Meoli Companies.

LOCALLY OWNED AND OPERATED

As a teenager, local McDonald's franchisee Mike Meoli spent his weekend and summer days at McDonald's sweeping floors, cleaning the parking lot, and helping customers with their every need. The hours were long, but the days were short.

After college, Mike went full-time into his family's McDonald's business, learning all aspects of restaurant operations, financial management, and people development.

Fast forward to today and Mike Meoli has built a portfolio of 25 McDonald's restaurants across Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore and employs nearly 1,300 crew, managers and supervisory-level staff. He is one of the owner/operators who make up 90 percent of the U.S. McDonald's franchisee system and is now the largest owner/operator organization in the state of Delaware.

Meoli's restaurants are consistently recognized by McDonald's Corporation for their outstanding achievements in customer satisfaction, superb operations, and employee and management development. He has received numerous recognitions within the McDonald's system including McDonald's Corporation's most prestigious award – the Golden Arch Award – which recognizes the outstanding achievements of the top one percent of owner/operators worldwide.

"I feel so fortunate that I get to do a job that I love, with people I enjoy working with, and in so many great communities across the Delmarva Peninsula," said Meoli. "McDonald's has given me opportunities to succeed in ways I couldn't possibly have imagined when I was younger."

Today, those possibilities have turned into an exciting and rewarding reality. His growth as an organization means he can do more. More for his people, more for his communities, and more for the charitable organizations that mean the most to him.

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Building a successful business begins with hiring the right people and surrounding yourself with employees who make the organization better. Meoli made it a top priority to hire, train, and retain the best talent and provide them the opportunities to learn and grow. Simply put, he puts his people first.

For some, McDonald's was a first job or a summer job. For many, that first job became a lasting career, with endless opportunities for advancement and education. 95 percent of Meoli's management team have been promoted from within his organization.

"Mike Meoli has been a bridge builder between Delaware's business and nonprofit community for decades," Delaware State Senator Ernesto B. "Ernie" López said. "The importance he places on building up others for success and creating an environment for achievement has been a talent uniquely his own and one he continues to pursue. Mike puts others first and for that, I am tremendously grateful, and I value

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the investment he makes daily in making Delaware a better place to live and work."

Within his organization, Meoli offers all eligible employees and managers paid time off and 401k programs, free meals, free uniforms, and a chance to join Archways to Opportunity – a comprehensive, education program with multiple learning paths like high school diploma completion, college tuition assistance, and English-language learning skills.

"Education lays the foundation for a successful and powerful workforce," Meoli says. "Through Archways to Opportunity and other community partnerships, we are able to give people the access to education they might not have otherwise had."

In addition to his many employee benefit options, Meoli supports dozens of education enrichment programs and organizations in his business communities. These include college scholarships for high school seniors at 25 Delmarva-area schools, and a Community College Scholarship Program for non-traditional community college students. These scholarships support students who demonstrated a commitment to furthering their education by exhibiting scholastic achievement and ongoing community service.

"It's important that students of all ages understand the value of continuous learning, working hard, and giving back," Meoli added. "From a very young age my grandfather and father made it clear that these values are what's important, and that it's my responsibility to use my resources to help improve the lives of those in my circle of influence. My hope is that

these scholarships will give students a platform to learn, grow and continue to give back just like I was encouraged to do."

USING HIS SCALE FOR GOOD

Mike Meoli is committed to using his organization's scale for good. That means using his resources and restaurant footprint to do the right thing each and every day. It's why he made it his mission to build and grow his business portfolio across the Shore.

"For certain, there is an incremental degree of pressure and responsibility that comes with organizational growth," says Meoli. "From franchisor expectations, people development, to capital reinvestment, expanding my business footprint brought with it a whole new level of stress and anxiety. But for me, the effort has been totally worth it. My business expansion has created wonderful growth opportunities for my crew and managers, and it's given me greater opportunities to build brand trust for McDonald's and to support the causes and organizations that matter to me most."

"Mike is a lifelong leader – not only in the restaurant industry through his iconic brand but within each of the local communities in which he serves," president and CEO of the Delaware Restaurant Association Carrie Leishman said. "His family and restaurants are beacons in each community, and they are deeply committed to providing opportunities and valuable careers for those they employ. They help make the lives better for those they commit to through their philanthropic work."



One of the most recent examples of his community philanthropy is Meoli's sponsorship of Delaware State University Athletics. The multi-year partnership agreement between Meoli and the HBCU becomes the first between McDonald's and Delaware State since the University's establishment.

"Since purchasing the Dover McDonald's restaurants in 2020, it has been our mission to find ways to engage with organizations like Delaware State University," Meoli said. "These student-athletes are vital members of the community. They are our future leaders and we are honored to be a part of their team."

In addition to Meoli's education advocacy, he and his company recently provided financial support to the Cancer Center at Nanticoke Hospital in Seaford, DE, the Breast Center at the University of Maryland Shore Regional Health in Easton, MD, the Lewes Library Capital Expansion, Sandhill Fields, Delmarva Christian High School, and Sussex Academy, each in Georgetown, DE.

Mike also gives his valuable time. He serves on the board of directors for Beebe Healthcare in Lewes, DE and the Rehoboth Beach-Dewey Beach Chamber of Commerce. He also serves on the board of The Dresher Foundation, a Maryland-based charitable foundation established by his grandfather in 1988. Mike is a former board chairman of the Sussex Family YMCA and most recently, he and his wife Kelli served as co-chairs for the 'I Believe in Beebe' Capital Campaign, which raised over \$45 million for the Sussex County health care system.

"Being raised in a family that has a long legacy of philanthropy, Mike

has been integral in supporting the continued growth of Beebe Healthcare in Sussex County," president of Beebe Medical Foundation Thomas J. Protack shared. "His advice and guidance as a hospital board member, his loyal and strong financial support of the Foundation, and his constant presence at our fundraising events is the fabric of his leadership as a community partner."

Mike Meoli has spent decades creating opportunities for his people, enhancing the communities in which he operates, and building customer trust for the McDonald's brand that he loves so much. He feels fortunate that he's able to use his financial resources, time and talent in ways that make a difference.

His hope is that his example is an inspiration to others. He's proud to work and live in a community that's filled with so many others who share his values and emulate his work ethic. He likes to reference the many years he's been committed to the people, brand, and philanthropic initiatives, which are so important to him. And when you listen to him speak, you

can feel the passion in his voice, and you come away feeling like he's just getting started. ■



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