



## Four Generations of Bringing Family to the Community

### COVER STORY

By Jenna Caputo | Photos by Jeff Foley of Foley Photography

Sometimes growing up as part of a family legacy can be daunting, but for the Haraden family, it's just who they are. For four generations and counting, they have been the driving force behind what is now known as Mohawk Honda. Employing over 200 people in the Capital District, and constantly supporting our local charities, the Haradens have been a fixture of our community for 100 years.

Joe Haraden, Sr. was originally an engineer at G.E., but he was interested in the new "horseless carriages" that were coming out. In 1919, he left G.E. to open a Chevrolet franchise. He realized he was watching the future unfold before his very eyes, and he wanted a part of it. "It would be like the coming of the autonomous vehicles in our future," says his grandson, Jeff Haraden.

They originally sold Chevrolets, Scripp Booths and Moon automobiles, but in 1971, under the leadership of Joe's son, Buzz, Hondas were added to the mix. "My father saw all the imports pouring into town," says Jeff. "He was a good friend with Kevin Langan, who had two different Volkswagen dealerships, and was doing very well with the Beetle. I can remember my father saying, 'I don't care what it is, the next import I see, I'm grabbing it.' They came out with the Civic in 1973, and then we had the oil embargo and we were buying gas on odd and even days. All of a sudden, people started paying attention to gas mileage and quality. The quality was mind-boggling, and it took off like

a rocket. We couldn't get enough of them." By 1980, Mohawk Auto Sales became Mohawk Honda.

It was never a given that the business would stay in the family, but Jeff always enjoyed that new car smell and started working there in high school, cleaning up the used cars at night, and then working his way through nearly every other position in the dealership. After graduating Niskayuna High School, Jeff received his associate degree in automotive marketing from Northwood University in Michigan, before coming back home to work full time.

Eventually, Buzz sold his interest in the business to Jeff and his brother, Steve, and they have expanded the company by adding the new site to Glenville. Their goal was to make it as green as possible, using solar panels, trees, lower wattage and specific energy-use measures for lighting, temperature, water consumption and solar energy. Their efforts earned



them the Platinum-Level Honda Environmental Leadership Award. "We are committed to being environmental stewards and making sure we do our part to help protect our environment," says Lindsey Haraden, Jeff's daughter and the company's sales manager. "Mohawk Honda is extremely proud to have been awarded this prestigious honor."

Even though the business has been in the family for four generations, it's not guaranteed that each kid will work there. "We would like them all to work elsewhere for at least five years, and then if they would like to work at the dealership they will interview and go from there. It's not a given," says Kara, Jeff's wife.

Supporting the community has always been important to the Haraden family. The whole Mohawk Honda team donates their time and resources to many local groups and charities. In honor of their 100th anniversary, Mohawk Honda will give 10 local charities \$10,000 each, in addition to their employees serving 10,000 hours of community service throughout the year. "Community service has been a pillar of our business philosophy since my grandfather started this company," says Jeff. "We have always been proud to be part of the community, and to partner with so many great organizations over the years. We thought this was a great way for the Mohawk Family to say thank you and to help these great organizations continue to provide their important services and carry out their missions."

The charities receiving the \$100,000 this year are: Vanderheyden Hall in Troy, City Mission of Schenectady, Special Olympics New York-Capital Region, Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Capital Region, Boys & Girls Clubs of Schenectady, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Upstate NY / VT, the Autism Society of the Greater Capital Region, the American Suicide Prevention Foundation's Capital Region NY Chapter, Equinox of Albany & Newmeadow School in Clifton Park.

Jeff and Kara now have five children: Lindsey, Karly, Jesse, Dylan and Brady, ranging in age from 16-31, as well as five rescue dogs and four cats. They enjoy attending concerts at the Times Union Center and at SPAC, as well as all that Saratoga has to offer, including the restaurants and the track. But they really love being out on Lake George, swimming, boating and enjoying the area.

As a water-loving family, the kids all were swimming by five years old. "With the lake and having a pool, the kids were introduced to water at a very young age," says Kara. "Swimming lessons were a definite. They led to summer swim team, which led to swim club swimming and then college swimming. The sport has been absolutely amazing for all of them. They've made lifelong friends and learned a lifetime sport that requires crazy discipline. We are very proud of them."



*Photo by Tammy Loya of Tammy Loya Studio*

Kara also has been busy helping the community. As president of the Adirondack Aquatic Center (AAC), Kara and a group of parents have been working tirelessly since 2013 to provide the area with a state-of-the-art aquatic center and Olympic size pool, not only for competitions, but for community activities and therapy as well. This facility is planned to open in 2020 with an expected economic impact of \$40 million. Kara says the AAC is a "planned multi-pool facility with water of varying depths and temperatures, which will provide programs that advance the safety and health of area residents from infants to seniors. AAC will bring together in one venue all major aquatic sports: competitive swimming and diving, water polo, synchronized swimming and other unique sports. AAC will offer something for everyone and be a place to learn, heal, play, exercise, train and compete in the water!"

When not taking care of his family or his work family, Jeff serves on multiple boards and relaxes by cooking, grilling, landscaping and boating.

Over the years, the Haradens have found that the most frustrating part of the car business is the perceived reputations of car dealers, and they work hard every day to show how wrong that stereotype is. They strive to make customers happy, as well as their employees, because as Jeff says, the two go hand in hand. "We believe that our employees are our number one asset. Our employees are happy and well-trained, which makes for happy customers."

Besides being involved in the community and always giving back, this is a lesson that has been passed down through the Haraden family for four generations now, and the key to any successful business. "I learned that having the best people and treating them the way I want to be treated is the key success to business," says Jeff. "Your employees spend more time at their jobs than they do with their families. They must be happy and successful with both families." ■

Do you know a neighbor who has a story to share? Nominate your neighbor to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Contact us at [jcaputo@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:jcaputo@bestversionmedia.com).