

One Man's Decision to Take Over the Family Business Has Helped Thousands



Our Town America is more than just a business to many

By Yitzi Weiner and Casmin Wisner

I had the great pleasure to interview Michael Plummer, Jr, President and CEO of Our Town America, the nation's leading new mover marketing franchise business with more than 60 franchises nationwide.

Thank you so much for doing this with us! What is your backstory?

My journey to becoming the CEO of Our Town America began when I was 20 and my dad—a very hard working and generous man to everyone—offered me a job at the family business. The salary would have been a fortune for most 20-year-olds, but I declined. Instead I enlisted in the army and became a medic for the U.S. Army.

My dad didn't exactly think it was a great idea, but I wanted to work in medicine and create my own path. That was a decision I will never regret—and eventually my dad came around. Before long, you could tell he was very proud of what I was doing, and that I was forging my own path.

In the year 2000 my dad had a major heart attack, and while he came out of it

okay, I decided to finally take his job offer and work with him at Our Town America. I've never regretted that decision either. In 2009, my dad—who was only 57—had another heart attack and passed away suddenly. A few days after the funeral I was in my dad's office signing paychecks for his 30 employees when once again I had a big decision to make.

A business broker asked if I was interested in selling the business. I immediately said that I was not, but then I started having doubts. The recession was raging and it was a scary time. I started thinking that it might not be such a bad idea to sell the company.

Long story short, I decided to throw myself into Our Town America, and fortunately, I'm three for three. I've never regretted that decision either. I'm extremely proud that we are celebrating 45 years in business as we unveil our brand new 44,000 square foot facility in Clearwater.

Can you share the funniest or most interesting story that happened to you since you began leading your company?

After growing up into my teens swearing I didn't want to be like my dad, I am proud to say I am very much like him. I remember sitting with him on many occasions at 6:30 in the morning, enjoying a cup of coffee and listening to him explain some things that we were working on and why they were important. Some of the choices didn't make a lot of sense to me at the time, but now—since having been in similar situations—I find myself doing similar things and making similar choices. While some situations call for obvious decisions, some need a little more heart and finesse.

So, what exactly does your company do?

We are a new mover marketing company that specializes in connecting businesses with new, loyal customers. For 45 years our innovative, new mover marketing program has helped businesses nationwide develop a constant stream of new, loyal customers.

We do that by connecting businesses with families that have just moved into the community and other potential customers near their businesses using our famous welcoming package and full-color postcards.

You get new customers each month who are actively searching for new businesses. It's a niche market, but if you think about it, businesses want new customers, and

customers who have just moved into an area want to know what's out there. They're actually far more receptive to advertising than residents who have lived in the area forever.

What do you think makes your company stand out? Can you share a story?

After 45 years we have not only perfected our craft, but we have grown to be the most technologically savvy new mover marketing franchise in our industry. Our program offers tracking by barcoded certificates and postcards, tells you who came in by month, and allows you to build reports based off who redeemed the first offer.

Unlike most other welcome programs, we reach all new-mover families (not just home purchases). Plus, people really respond to our high-value gift certificates. Our loyalty program thanks customers after their visit with a postcard to generate repeat visits, and our e-survey gives business owners survey feedback from their customers to help them monitor customer satisfaction and post favorable comments to their Facebook page.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful for who helped get you to where you are?

This won't be surprising, but I'm grateful for my father Michael Plummer Sr. He founded Our Town America in 1972 and truly had a love for our company and each of our franchisees. His guidance—in business and in life—helped shape me into the person that I am today and paved the way for this company.

How have you used your success to bring goodness to the world?

I believe that hard work breeds success. If you truly want something, go for it. I'd like to think our company is making life a little better and friendlier for people moving into a community. A big move can be stressful and even scary, so I hope we're doing our part to help people. I'd also like to think our company is helping franchise owners and their employees provide for their families.

What are your "5 things I wish someone told me before I became CEO," and why?

Having been mentored by my father, I think I was somewhat told what to expect, but here are some lessons I have learned through experience and from my father.

1. By no means is running a company a spectator sport. The job can be 24/7. I

have worked on vacations, my honeymoon, and during breaks at family events. When things need to be done, you need to do them. I frequently get the misperception from friends that in my position I can take breaks and be unreachable and unavailable. Sometimes I am able, but again, if it needs to be addressed by me, I need to be available.

2. Get used to constant noise. In other words, when you choose a direction, there is always someone who will disagree—or to some degree second guess you. While it is good to have that around you to keep you from missing something, you cannot make everyone happy all the time. Instead think, “What do I truly feel the proper decision is that needs to be made?” If my heart feels it is right, I go with it after looking at all angles and gathering the input around me.
3. Take some breaks and delegate as you can. There is a lot of responsibility in running a business, and there are also times that you don’t want to miss being with your family. Growing up in this, it was very common to have the topic of dinner conversations revolve around work. I have found with a small break or getaway here and there it helps me be more effective and decompress. Granted, I am still reachable.
4. Surround yourself with good people you can trust. Through the good and the bad, it is better to have someone around who you can truly trust and rely on who won’t always tell you what you want to hear.
5. Address a mistake head on. I think this has always been my character. It is better to address something directly and clean it up quickly versus having something turn into a bigger problem at a later time.

Is there a person in the world whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why?

Joe Maddon. I love baseball and I am a Rays fan, so I’ve always respected him greatly as coach. He took the Rays from one of the worst placed teams to the very top, and now seeing the great work he has done with the Cubs, I would love to talk to him about his strategy.