

Mike Prichinello, FCRH '97, Interview Transcript

Sara Hunt Munoz:

We originally interviewed Mike in January of 2020, a few months before we all went into lockdown.

Matt Burns:

We caught up with them again recently to get some updates on his life and some of the projects he'd been working on. Stick around after the interview to hear more.

Matt Burns:

Hey listeners, welcome to Fordham Footsteps, the podcast that features Fordham alumni and discusses their path from their time as a student to their current career.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

Some will have a direct correlation to their majors and others will describe how they took some unexpected turns.

Matt Burns:

Either way, expect to hear an insider's guide to certain industries and some great stories from our esteemed alumni. I'm Matt Burns, associate director for young alumni and student engagement.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

And I'm Sara Hunt Munoz, senior director for strategic initiatives. With us today is Mike Prichinello, Fordham College at Rose Hill class of '97. Welcome.

Mike Prichinello:

Yeah, thanks for having me.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

So a BA in History and Sociology-

Mike Prichinello:

That's right.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

What were you hoping to do with that?

Mike Prichinello:

Had no idea. I had no idea.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

So, how did you choose those majors?

Mike Prichinello:

Prior to the Fordham, I graduated from Chaminade High School on Long Island there, and very much on the path for success. I think that label of success was other people's definition. So I grew up on Long Island, very typical New York area growth. My parents always wanted me to be more successful than them and they were successful. And their definition of success was banker, doctor, lawyer, those sort of traditional things. And so, I was raised on that trajectory and the whole time I was in it, I did my best. This is what I supposed to do, but somewhere deep in my subconscious, it was like, this is not for me. I was like a skateboarder growing up and all that stuff. I have a pretty heavy rebellious streak to me.

Mike Prichinello:

So, I was going through it. And at 17, the only thing I knew at 17 was, I didn't know what I wanted to do. My niece is going through it now. My niece is in college and she's in a nursing program and she had to decide, at 16 years old, that she wants to be a nurse.

Mike Prichinello:

I'm 44 now. And I have figured my life out maybe eight years ago. It's a hard pressure on young people. This is what I want to do for the rest of my life. And so, history was just naturally interesting to me. I thought, let me do that. And I went through all those conversations with my parents, everybody else, like, "How are you going to make money doing that?" And I thought, it's not really about that. I'm learning something. If you know the past, you'll have a better sense of how to navigate the future. And that's how I wound up there.

Matt Burns:

So, what was your first step out of school?

Mike Prichinello:

When I was maybe a junior or senior, I think a junior, I decided I wanted to be in the FBI.

Matt Burns:

Really?

Mike Prichinello:

Yeah. I think it was mostly movie driven.

Matt Burns:

Your rebellious streak.

Mike Prichinello:

Yes, exactly. I felt like, hide out the dumpster, follow some people around, have a gun on my hip. This all sounds pretty good. Looks good in the movies. Fordham happens to be a pretty good place to be if that's the trajectory you have. And so, I bothered the dean at the time. Just get me any job in politics, any job, I'll figure it out from there and just need to meet some people. So, I wound up on the communications team for the Lieutenant governor at the time, who was Betsy McCaughey Ross. I've worked in that office a hundred hours a week. I started off in policy writing. And then I was sort of always a media junkie and I thought there's a place of influence. I wasn't really one for institutionalization. I want to be on the press team. So, kind of like that quite a bit.

Mike Prichinello:

I ran press conferences up and down the state every single week. And I got to meet a lot of people doing it. It was really interesting. I did that for a year and a half, most of it as an intern. And then after that, I decided politicians are a bit weird, man.

Matt Burns:

Why is that?

Mike Prichinello:

Celebrity is a thing, right? But most celebrities try to keep their private life private. And I noticed all of these very influential people I met, they were putting their kids out and they're making their whole private life very public. And I felt that to be odd behavior. I saw how easy it was to be corrupted, the compromises one has to make all the time. And I just thought, this was really interesting. And, I started at a very high place. Her husband at the time was Wilbur Ross.

Mike Prichinello:

So I had dinner with Wilbur Ross five nights a week. So, I learned a lot. Our politics don't align personally, but I was 19 at the time, or 20 at the time. And I just learned a lot, Betsy didn't, I guess, trust a lot of people had a small circle around her. I had lunch and dinner with the most notable people in the world. I had lunch with Al Gore one day and then dinner with Henry Kissinger, same day. It was just a crazy little life I had.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

And you had all that history knowledge to draw from to have conversations with them.

Mike Prichinello:

And after that run was over, I was like, what are we going to do work for a local, I had greater ambitions in that. So then, I became a sales person. I gave myself exactly one year, literally one year to take a sales job. I think everything in the world of sales, no matter what you want to do in life, you got to learn sales. So I worked for Frontier Communications. I sold these big data communications services to companies. And I went there. They sent me to every single sales course I wanted to go to. So I went to one in Dallas. I went to one in Atlanta. I actually made a lot of money doing that. But at the 365th day, I split. And then, I started working at a PR firm. And that really helped me the sort of the sales, again, everything is sales.

Mike Prichinello:

So, I was creating new stories for entrepreneurial companies, but you got to sell that story to somebody else. And that one year that I did that, I was still really surfing. I didn't like living on that monthly calendar though. How many sales did you make? [crosstalk 00:05:01]. It's very Gengarry Glen Ross.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

When did you know that you wanted to branch out and do your own thing and work for yourself?

Mike Prichinello:

I worked at a really cool PR firm called RLM public relations. It was run by a cool cat named Richard Laermer, just a very avant-garde cool new Yorker. He wrote a book back in the day, a series of books called The Native Guide to New York. And it was all about how to survive New York in a right way. This is like the nineties. New York in the nineties was cool. He had a very particular way of seeing the world. I think, maybe a bit similar to mine, kind of avant garde and weird. And we worked for entrepreneurial companies. So at the time, it was the first start of the digital wave, internet 1.0. And I got on with him really well. And when I started, RLM had maybe 12 employees, it was really boutique-y and cool. And I just got on with him really well.

Mike Prichinello:

I think we were both big fans of culture. We saw it the same way and I became president of that place and he tasked me to help grow it, and we grew to three offices. We had a cause marketing office in DC for a while. We opened up one in LA. We grew to 55, 60 employees. I co-authored a book with Richard at the time called Full Frontal PR for Bloomberg. So, I was in my young twenties and doing really well. And I got to work for companies like Amazon, but when Amazon was brand new. Jeff Bezos used to be a very odd quixotic character. And before they were public, they didn't really know what to make of him. And Richard and I were hired to work on his personal public persona. I got really deep into well-funded startups and played a really critical role in all of those.

Mike Prichinello:

And I think that, it was then when I thought, perhaps, I have the leadership qualities to do my own thing, or at least if I didn't have that, I certainly had the guts to do it. I don't gamble. You'll never see me in Las Vegas or anything like that, but I bet big everywhere else. And that's just always been my nature. All the chips on the table, let's just go do it. And, I got to a point, I was out at RLM for maybe seven years, which is a long time back then. And especially in that sort of a world and there was nothing more I could do. I didn't own the farm. I was basically running it. I got on really well with Richard, but it was time for me to go do something else. So, I started my own PR firm because I like doing the work. I didn't like the management or the accounting of it all.

Mike Prichinello:

It occurred to me that an agency should either have five employees or 500. And anywhere in between, you're in this constant crush for resources. I just liked doing the work. So I hired two other people who I respected, who were good. And we had six clients and I worked on all of them. I did all this stuff I like to do. And I did that for a long time. And that was really cool. And that led to me to the job that I have now. So now, I'm co-founder and I run a business called the Classic Car Club.

Mike Prichinello:

So, the Classic Car Club was started by one of my partners, Phil Cavanaugh, back in 1995 in England. So, Phil's an Englishman. Don't call him a Brit. He is an Englishman. And when it started, Phil ran a really successful construction company in England with his brother. And at a young age, there were buying cool cars like old Ferrari's and things like that.

Mike Prichinello:

The story goes is that there was a 1960s E-type JAG that was for sale. And they wanted to reward themselves doing a good job and have cool car. And at the time, there was a real bubble around that car, the price of it, it was like 300,000 pounds at the time. And what they had learned is you can't put two names on a car title, kind of like two English brothers do they trust each other enough. There's a story about a Porsche that was traded for Warhols and all that stuff kind of always right between them. But out of that, they sort of hatched this idea to put ordinary people in outstanding cars. And in London, the Classic Car Club was very much almost like a pre-paid rental to drive classic cars.

Mike Prichinello:

And Phil had ambitions to bring the car club concept to America. He's big fan of American Graffiti. I think at the time in England, after the war, you had a lot of American soldiers in the UK and they would fly over their muscle cars, I guess, on the military jets and stuff. And there was a big military presence in England. And so, he grew up seeing American soldiers in '65 Mustangs and things like that. And it made an impact on him. And if you were from England or Europe, America is the market you want to be in, especially then. And he was introduced to me by a gentleman I knew called Simon Williams, who ran another branding firm called Sterling brands, had an office in London and in New York. And he said, you know this guy, Michael, who likes cars and maybe thinks the way you do. You should probably meet him.

Mike Prichinello:

It was something like see the idea and help them get a go and find investment. I saw something that had a lot of me in it, completely non-traditional, something completely fun, unproven. Go to an insurance company and say, we're going to have a room full of vintage Ferrari's and Lamborghini's, and we're going to put ordinary people in it and see how quickly that conversation. But I just sort of got on with Phil, same wavelength perhaps. And I just said, "I have this agency, so I want to do it with you." And so that's sort of how it started.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

And you truly love cars? Was that really a passion of yours?

Mike Prichinello:

I did, yeah. At the time, I was still young. I was maybe 28, I guess. But I had a triumph Spitfire. I had my little classic car. I had gone to skip barber racing school. My daily driver was a five series BMW that I ordered with a manual gearbox.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

So, you were into cars?

Mike Prichinello:

I was, yeah. Our third partner is my friend named Zach Moseley, who I didn't know at the time, but he's a lighting designer for architecture. So he had done the lighting design for every Jean-Georges restaurant, museums around the world. And he was always a car guy too. And he was working with an architect in England to do the legend design for a big museum. And on the way home back to New York, he was on a Virgin flight and he was just looking for anything automotive related on in-flight. And he saw a documentary on the car club in London. And when he landed, he called and said, I want to do this in New York. And you got James who worked there said, well, funny enough, Phil's in New York's trying to find someone to do it.

Mike Prichinello:

When I met Phil the first time, I had a notebook with no lines on it. And Zach met him and Zach had the same notebook, but it has grid paper on it. It's very much the way that Zach and I are. Zach is operationally minded and very structured. I have zero structure. And I think Phil is smart enough to say, let me introduce these two guys to each other. I might have one superhuman out of two half humans. And he was right. And ever since then, we've been running the Classic Car Club and it's been an excellent life for me. It's been very hard at times trying to do something very, very different, something that had not existed before. It really is a blessing and a curse, but we persevered. And now, the car club is a real global brand. And every year we have a growth spurt. And I think that 2020 is going to be a very, very big one for us.

Mike Prichinello:

We're Expanding to Los Angeles and figuring out really interesting and unique ways to bring our brand to everybody. So right now, we sort of built the most exclusive component of the business, but we're not about exclusivity or the nature of the business is democratic in a way. It's about giving everybody an awesome experience they wouldn't be able to have otherwise. And so now that we have this brand, we can sort of bring it to more and more people, but that's what we're spending on 2020. It's really fun.

Matt Burns:

So, how does the club function. I'm a member, what does that get me?

Mike Prichinello:

So the way it works now, these days is, so you're a member of the club like any private club, I guess that would be like a golf club or Soho house or anything like that. But we are very unique. Our focus is very clear, which is to provide our members with an outstanding automotive and adventurous experience they wouldn't be able to have otherwise. And so, members join. They pay a monthly fee to be a member. You have to apply. You get accepted. We have a staggeringly stylish fleet of cars here in New York. So that's everything from about 1955 554 spider, which you might know as like the James Dean car, all the way to brand new super cars and everything kind of weird in between. So our fleet is usually about 40 cars. We've owned hundreds of cars in New York. I started with 17 cars and every few months there's new cars in the fleet. And we used to be down on Hudson street. So we had 9,400 square feet on Hudson street. Now we're in in Pier 76 in Hudson River Park. We have 40,000 square feet.

Mike Prichinello:

So what happened was, we have these members who joined and drive our cars, but also we became a social nucleus of their social life. These days we produce about 300 events a year. So yesterday, I was just working with the team on the 2020 calendar. And that includes driving super land rovers across the

glaciers in Iceland, something you're not going to do on your own, but you do it, the camaraderie with the members. But that's also culinary rallies through Italy and really elevated wine tastings with the car club itself.

Mike Prichinello:

What's happened as we've grown over the years is, people want it to be more and more part of the culture. Not everybody wanted to drive though for three main reasons, either it was not affordable for them, even though it's very affordable, the way that we do it, we don't price things ostentatiously. It was either that, or a lot of these people have 20 cars already of their own and they really don't drive. And mostly it's just time.

Mike Prichinello:

However, they saw that we do these events. And so we moved to the new space. We built it out with a full bar restaurant lounge. We have this really great simulator rooms, most sophisticated simulator room on the east coast and it's events all the time. It's a cool room. I think when you go to most places in New York or anywhere, you go to a club, you go to a restaurant, you'll see a type of person there. And then you go to the car club at night and it'd be a couple hundred members out on the terrace, enjoying the sunset, having some rose, having dinner, talking about cars. And it'd be like every walk of life. And every conversation is really easy to have because everybody has a very specific appreciation for automotive culture.

Matt Burns:

Now you were asked, what do you do with a history sociology major? How do you make money with it? This sounds like exactly how you do it, intersecting so many different parts of our culture, beyond the groups you're bringing together.

Mike Prichinello:

Whatever success I've had I think is because I was lucky enough to understand that I had to have the courage to learn who I am. I always dreaded the idea of just being in a cubicle. That's not for me being told what to do by someone who I mildly respected. I didn't want to wake up one day, literally be 44 years old like I am now. I just bumped 20 years of my life doing something for a paycheck.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

Well, we talked about how it's deeply important to know what you don't want to do as it is to know the path that you're going to take.

Mike Prichinello:

Money's important. I've never chased money. Actually, that's not true. When I was young, I was doing sales because that's what sales is. [crosstalk 00:14:30]. So that's sort of the metric. And I enjoyed that to an extent, but it occurred to me quite quickly that money literally doesn't buy happiness, very cliché. But I figured that if I do what I really liked to do or what I had a passion for, I would naturally have a higher success rate at that. And with success, usually comes enough money to live the life that's important to you.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

Can you pinpoint anything from Fordham that you took with you that inspires you today?

Mike Prichinello:

One of the things that I really appreciate about going to Fordham is that it's in New York city. And again, I went to Chaminade. So I went to school with a lot of young men who went to great colleges, which were mostly in the sticks. And I had a great job working for the lieutenant governor. My internship ended at the beginning of my senior year and I was making excellent money and I had a job and a business card and an new expense account as a senior. Use your proximity to the greatest city in the world to your benefit as a student, because there are so many people that you could meet. And those first interactions you have, those first relationships you make will take you very, very far. This was before social media and interactions, now, I feel are very quick and it's easy to reach out to someone. It's easy to forget about somebody, but nurture those relationships, use them.

Mike Prichinello:

A network is an ecosystem and you have to give more than you take from it. And that always really worked for me. And so, Fordham's proximity to greatness was the greatest takeaway for me.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

Do you have a mentor?

Mike Prichinello:

My business partners are my mentors. I know a lot of entrepreneurs. They run businesses either by themselves, which seems very lonely at times. And when things get tough and it's only you, that's hard. I also have friends who own businesses with a partner, which is very traditional, 50 50 kind of a thing. And, loggerheads. You just sort of like one person wants to go one way, resentment builds. And a lot of times a business will fizzle for that. I have two business partners, so we have a triumvirate and we run things really democratically. Zach is really great at operations. I'm really good at marketing and culture and branding. And Phil is really good at strategy and we respect each other's avenue and then challenge each other on everything we do really, really hard, push each other really hard.

Mike Prichinello:

But the end of the day two votes wins, them's the rules. I think that, that's been a big part of it too, but I'm lucky to have two business partners that I really like and admire. And so, they helped me through everything. In fact, my wife is about to have our first child any day.

Matt Burns:

Congrats.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

Exciting.

Mike Prichinello:

So, the only people I take parenting advice from is them too. It's a cool little team.

Matt Burns:

I just wanted to ask you, you work on an album, right? Or you just-

Mike Prichinello:

Yeah, this is one of the fun things I get to do at the car club. So for me, culture should be multifaceted. So, we play a really important role in automotive culture in America. The car club is looked at for guidance, how to appreciate it properly. Maybe that's the way to say it, arbiters of it all. And just speaking about cars all day is boring. I like food. I like music. I like all of those things. And I think, the most powerful kinds of things you could do in marketing or just presentation is to share your culture with a different culture and combine the two forces. And so, this past fall at the car club, we produced an album called Members Only. It was sharing our knowledge of car culture with another team's knowledge of music culture. So, we partnered with a really legendary producer called DJ Muggs. When I was in Fordham, Cypress Hill, which is the first band Muggs was in, they were the group that kicked off West Coast, hip hop culture.

Mike Prichinello:

That album black Sunday is 24/7 in my dorm room, and every other one of them in South. It was just the legendary album of the year. So, I got connected to him. Super cool dude. And we just put a program together, just out of love of doing it. So it had no monetary goals, but it still does well. So, I recorded the sounds that four of our cars make. I mean, that's everything from seatbelt clicks, and door shuts, to engine noises and all that. And then, he turned each car into a track, really clever, really high quality production. I met him through a friend of mine named Meyhem Lauren, who's an emcee from Queens, a really, really talented one too. He's also won a couple of bike shows and stuff. We call him Little World Cups, he's the voice of the World Cup, among other things. And the two of them were artists.

Mike Prichinello:

And by that, I mean, they are just always looking to create art, do projects. And they had an appreciation for car culture. And I had an appreciation for music culture. So, we made this album. We did a four song LP, shot videos and everything for it. And the hip hop community really liked it. He made it to the top 10 iTunes charts over the summer, which is great. We did 500 limited edition vinyl pressings of it that sold out in an hour or two. And I'll be on Meyhem's Instagram account. And you'll see him performing our songs around the world. It's cool. So now, we're like huddling back together. We do a full album. Car club's going to LA. Maybe we launch LA with an album and car and music festival. That'd be fun, right. Again, take those cultures further and we were able to share our culture on airwaves.

Mike Prichinello:

Now, how do we do it in public with a hundred thousand people? That would be the next thing. To get those two kinds of people in one room and meet each other, not just share each other's audio.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

And you're podcasting?

Mike Prichinello:

Yeah. Car club has a podcast called Sonic Drives. The idea is we're very lucky to have so much access to these really outstanding cars. So how do I put everybody else into a car? So I tell a little story about a car I admire. Phil reads it. In his excellent English accent. And then I drive the car spiritedly usually around Monticello motor sports track, and we record it with binaural audio technology, and then we don't talk

or anything during the drive, you just sort of put on a good set of headphones. [crosstalk 00:19:40] it's actually really fun.

Mike Prichinello:

Obviously, there are certain sounds that cars make that are exotic, but also like other things like new Super cars and hyper cars have such good aerodynamics that the predominant sounds you hear now is the compression of wind. So, off of the spoiler and stuff, they sound like space shuttles go and bind them. So then you get off and that's something I learned from doing. And again, it's all just trying to share the very lucky and privileged life I have with as many people as I can.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

What haven't you done that you might like to do?

Mike Prichinello:

I'd like to win a motorcycle race. I've won automotive races. I'm mildly fast on a bike. Something I really dedicate my life to is learning how to ride a motorcycle really, really well. We sponsor a young racer from New Jersey named Brandon Paacsh, motorcycle road racing in America is not a very big sport, but in Europe it's a religion.

Mike Prichinello:

And there's this young kid, man from New Jersey, who's dedicated his entire life since he's four years old doing it. So we sponsor him and this year or 2019 season, he was the British Super bike motor three champion. We were able to sponsor him in a MotoGP wildcard race. So MotoGP is like the formula one of motorcycle racing. It's the highest level in the world. And he did really well.

Mike Prichinello:

One of my goals this year is to help share whatever resources we have to watch him succeed in his goals because it's not everyday you get to meet someone with so much drive and singular focus to be able to shut off so many other parts of life to just do this one thing. You don't see that in many people. It's awe inspiring when you do. And then on the business side of things, we will build a Classic Car Club in LA. That's obviously a huge goal to do that, to do it well and bring our culture to LA, which is a very different city than New York.

Matt Burns:

Bringing great cars to great LA traffic.

Mike Prichinello:

Yeah. Make traffic look better.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

What's the timeline for that?

Mike Prichinello:

Timeline is we have a location. So, just finish the acquisition of that. We have three that we're really looking at. So decide the right one. The timeline, I'll tell you what the timeline is. The timeline is, when

it's right, it's right. We don't pressure ourselves. That's probably a way to fail, but it feels right because we've just learned to do things by both math and gut and somewhere right in the middle of that, you'll find your sweet spot at the time to act.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

It sounds very Ignatian to me.

Matt Burns:

It really does.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

You sort of spooled around it, but I feel like a lot of what you're saying is very Ignatian and very Fordham and sort of, light that fire, follow that path, follow your dream kind of thing.

Matt Burns:

Search for something more.

Mike Prichinello:

Yeah, that's it. Just keep on challenging yourself. I don't want to ever wake up and be bored. I haven't had a midlife crisis yet. That's what I've been fighting, off a midlife crisis since I graduated. Just stay youthful, I guess try to do that, but yeah, LA will be a big one. We were actually saying earlier, we built the pointy as part of this business and this brand. And now we have this opportunity because we have a level of authority and we've proven ourselves as business owners and our business is very formidable. And when everybody says you can't do it, it will never work. It works and we've done it. Now we can monetize that, bring these experiences to more people, in more affordable ways and geographically more dispersed ways. So that could take form in anything buy all of the dormant drive-in movie theaters around the country.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

I would love that.

Mike Prichinello:

It was a really big part of American culture, how do you reinvigor Americana car culture for the modern day, how do we bring the fun that we have everyday to everybody else?

Matt Burns:

Is there any advice you would offer to current students, whether they're history, sociology majors, or if they want to get into cars?

Mike Prichinello:

The obvious path is not necessarily the one you should take. Be honest with yourself, what really interests you, not what you think you should do, but what really interests you. And then the earlier that you figured that out, and the early you expose yourself to that world, that culture, that industry, that geography, the happier you will be in life and by that, success will follow.

Matt Burns:

Hey Mike, thanks for chatting with us today.

Mike Prichinello:

Hey, it's good to talk with you on the backside of a pandemic. It's good to be back.

Matt Burns:

Yeah. So I'm sure our listeners want to hear what's been going on with you since we last spoke. You got to start out with this. We know that you and your wife have a daughter now. How's that going? And what was it like raising her during the pandemic?

Mike Prichinello:

It's going really well. Her name is Helena. She's approaching two years old in January, two years old. I didn't think that I would take to being a father as well as I have. I actually really enjoy it. She's been great fun. Raising her during a pandemic, continues to have positives and negatives. I worked the whole time during the pandemic. I didn't stay home every day while a lot of our business was shut down. As one of the people running it, I was here for most of it. But the first, maybe two months, or I'd say maybe six weeks, I was working exclusively from home. So, it was really good for me to be able to have that time with her. I don't think most Americans get that.

Mike Prichinello:

It's challenging because I'm vaccinated. Most people in New York are vaccinated, but obviously she's not. And so, I'm always walking this tight line of trying to socialize her and expose her to culture and have fun with her, and at the same time, protect her. She's proven pretty resilient. And I race motorcycles. So almost every weekend, we're somewhere else, different part of the country. She's in the paddock with us and everything. So, she gets to play with a lot of kids outside all the time, which is pretty good. It's been great though. It gives you, I'm sure everybody who has a kid knows this, but it's new to me, the perspective that I get on life, it's quite an awesome responsibility to have to raise somebody and educate them and my wife and I take it seriously. It's been great fun.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

Speaking of motorcycles, you did tell us about your passion for them. Have you had any luck racing? Have you won any races?

Mike Prichinello:

No. Last weekend I crashed and broke three ribs. No, it's okay. Actually my racing this year was really good. For so many reasons, it's not something you do cavalier. So, I'm 46 years old. I have to keep young to survive. So, I cycle on my bike all the time. I have more laps around Prospect Park than I think most people do. I watch what I eat. I stay in shape. It's a really good motivator. And then, the other thing is, like I said, I travel all up and down the East Coast in our truck. It's me, my wife, Kelly, and Helena. And we meet the rest of the team there. And it's just a selfish endeavor. It's asking a lot of people around me to tolerate what I do, but at the same time we get to do it together and we have a really good, fun race family.

Mike Prichinello:

And, it's part of being in the Classic Car Club. This is why I have this job. I race because I love to do it. But the other real thing about it is that, we're a club at a community that does things. So, I have about 18 members of the Classic Car Club now who have never ridden a motorcycle, except for one of them, certainly had never been on a track and now they all have a race bike. And we're out most weekends, if it's not one of my race weekends, we're out on track, we're training, we're learning. And those guys have gotten very proficient and very fast. And so for me, it's been a real pleasure to be able to get people out to do something in a very safe way because we're outside. We're social distancing at a hundred miles an hour.

Mike Prichinello:

So we're at not really near each other. And then, to see the evolution of somebody zip up leathers for the first time and say to themselves, "Oh my God, what am I doing? This is insane. How did this guy talk me into it?" To the first day they do it, and you see the endorphin level shoot off the charts for them. And then, you see the dedication happened to them too. Now I'm cycling with all them because they see, you have to be fitter than you were to do it. They come out every weekend. And I guess, that's one of the things I love about the car club is to share your passion with other people and then to see them really grab hold of it and make it part of their life and improve it and benefit from it. So from that perspective, the motorcycle racing has been super successful. I have not won a race. The season have come close, but I still try.

Matt Burns:

You have to let us know when you get there. So, it's great to hear that there's still been growth in a number of ways. When we talked back in January of 2020, you talked about 2020 as a hopeful year, one hopefully as a year of expansion for you starting the new LA branch there. How did COVID affect those plans? What's it been like?

Mike Prichinello:

Massively, a large component of our business here is that we run a lounge, a restaurant, a bar, a club room, all of that was shut down as per state mandate for most of the entire year. We're still operating under constructions. However, the automotive component of our business was considered essential. Those of us who live in New York, if you rewind back to March, April, May of 2020, it was very, very dark days here.

Mike Prichinello:

The pandemic was savage in New York and people were very hesitant to leave the house but you have to. Public transportation is something I wouldn't take during those times. And we made some really quick changes. So, we have our fleet of 35, 40 cars. We acquired a couple of ozone generators. So members are able to take the cars and we would go through a really, really vigorous cleaning procedure. And then before a car went out with a member, it sat with an ozone generator in the car for a number of hours. And an ozone generator, it removes all the oxygen, bacteria, viral components that are in the car. So, we made being a fun alternative way to enjoy a weekend with great cars into the most trustworthy form of transportation for our members. It was nice. I think that the members understood how much work we put into it and they really trusted us.

Mike Prichinello:

And over the year 2020, our membership actually grew. Me, Phil, and Zack, my partners who sat around like, "Okay, well we can't open our restaurant. We can't open our bar. Let's assume we're going to lose 30% of our membership," but we didn't. It was a real testament to them. I can't express my love for our members enough for sticking with us. And we did other things. Members continued to pay their monthly dues and not every member has driving privileges, but we took all the dues that they paid and we put it towards driving privileges. So suddenly, we went from 500 people who could drive our cars to go places to 2000. So, it's not to say it wasn't a profitable moment for us, but it was the right thing to do. I think it was the sensible thing to do.

Mike Prichinello:

And we were lucky to be in a position to provide a great service and be genuinely helpful. And we did that. The members responded in a real positive way. So, it was good. The restaurant certainly didn't perform like it did in 2019, but we worked really hard. We're lucky to have a big outdoor terrace. And when we were able to do small events, we did them and we made sure that we stuck to the code, made sure we wore a mask and everybody was safe. And the response that we got from members was mega. It was great. And it continues to grow. The end of March when we had to shut the restaurant down, it was a good moment for us to just sit down and assess where we are as a business, as individuals, what we want to do and how do we keep our community alive. And it turned into us being a pure car club, which was kind of nice.

Mike Prichinello:

We focused on doing weekend rallies where we'd meet in a parking lot, just assessing every little bit of the business and going through how it operates and then making a plan to improve those operations. And now in fall of 2021, we see all of those small improvements paying off. So, that's been pretty good.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

And with the hustle and bustle of your normal day to day, you probably don't have time to do that evaluation and make those tweaks. So it was good that you had that reflection time.

Mike Prichinello:

Yeah. I mean, 70% of your day is reacting. Now you have 70% of just building. And so, that was quite good. Just little improvements across a hundred different items. And it ratchets up to a really great improvement. As far as LA, travel really put a kibosh on that for us, but the emotion and enthusiasm to do it remained. And so we're back and forth to LA right now, very frequently trying to find the right building. Classic car clubs are very specific. Geographical needs just trying to find a place that's 40,000 square feet. That's just structurally interesting. We build it properly, they'll come. We have a really big brand in LA, even though we're not there. There's a very long wait list at classic car for people who would like to be members there. And so for us, it's about finding the right building where we can build a greater, better, newer interpretation of the Classic Car Club, because it's always about changing and improving and finding the right place to do it.

Mike Prichinello:

So, we're back there in six days, I think. We've bought a small fleet of cars for LA. So they're sitting out there with our plates on them waiting to be driven. And so, our expectations is to have construction happening in the next eight to 10 months in LA.

Matt Burns:

So, you also had an album out back in 2019, Members Only. Any new creative projects in the works?

Mike Prichinello:

So, that was with DJ Muggs and Meyhem Lauren. Were working on another one now. So, we'll have a continuation of that album in the next few months. We have a branding sort of creative agency as well called the 90. We work with automotive brands so much. Obviously, we have great experience with cars and that's everything from owning them to driving them, to maintaining them, to storing them. And we also have a real ground level look at what people like in life, what consumers want. And sometimes, when you're on the 38th floor of the office tower of BMW or GM, you're looking at it from the top down and you're not looking at it at the level where people are. So, I have 2000 people who are members who love cars and they come in and I see how they react. I see what they like. And our agency has been doing really well. And we're doing work for brands like Perrelli, Pollstar, a number of automotive brands and just helping them kind of understand what customers want, how to communicate to customers in a way that's a bit more exciting.

Mike Prichinello:

And so that's been a really great creative moment. We did a fleet of jet-skis this year. Boats, as well. So, we went from four wheels to also aquatic. And that was a really fun experiment and members like that. So we had space up at a really big lake in Connecticut. Some members could take our cars up and then we had a fabulous boat there, six jet-skis.

Mike Prichinello:

Our fifth magazine just came out. So we publish our own magazine here at Classic Car Club Magazine. I'm actually quite proud of it. I like it quite a bit. It's an automotive magazine by design, but I don't really think it's like other magazines. We don't do many car reviews or things like that. It's more about the culture that our members live in. So, it's experiential. That's what it is. It's about the experiences of driving rather than the cars themselves and what you can do with them. And then the other things that go along with each issue has a different focus. So, one was design. One was the future. So it was written from the perspective 2050. The one that just came out now is the nudie magazine.

Mike Prichinello:

So it's not human nudes, but it's really features sort of these fantastic cars without their body panels on them. So, you really get to see what makes an electric car different from a combustion car and things like that. We just came out with a beer, which was really good. There's a really great brewery in New York. So they brew right by Fordham in the Bronx. They're called Torch and Crown, and they have a beer garden restaurant in Soho. It's just fantastic. And so with them, we've doing this collaboration of our favorite racetracks and then a beer that's brewed domestically by that race tracker in that region. So, the first one was our favorite race tracks spot Franco Shop, which is in Belgium. And so we brewed a Cezanne to go along with it, which is a Belgium style farmhouse beer. And so, we brewed it with the brewery and then we designed the packaging and the cans and everything, and members love it for sure.

Mike Prichinello:

But the public at large does too. So, you could buy classic car club accelerator where you buy your other fine beers. [inaudible 00:34:40] try it. The next one we're doing is a German beer celebrating Saxon ring. And it will be a Pilsner. You're on my distribution list now. [crosstalk 00:34:48].

Matt Burns:

Well, Mike, congrats on all of the success and all of the things you found to be productive in a very difficult year. And of course, expanding your family there.

Mike Prichinello:

It was a while since our first interview, but I think I talked about how lucky and privileged I am to have two business partners. So, the democratic threesome of us, I can't take credit for most of the success. It's an entire team. We're up to probably 45 employees. And I feel like I do less work than I used to because there's a lot of talented people in the room. So, I'll take your congratulations and pass it on to all of them.

Matt Burns:

Share it to the team.

Mike Prichinello:

Yeah.

Matt Burns:

All right.

Sara Hunt Munoz:

Well, that's another edition of Fordham Footsteps.

Matt Burns:

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