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Point Pleasant's Bob Leach serves up smiles, one scoop at a time

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By *Brian Harris*

Everyone has those memories from their childhood summers that will always engulf them with a warm, fuzzy feeling. From crashing waves of days spent at the beach to the cacophony of laughter from you and your friends as you ran around from sunrise to sunset, these sounds are the reminders of some of the best times of your life.

Another one of those sounds most people remember from their childhoods is the calliope-fueled tune that every ice cream truck in the county plays to attract children with fistfuls of their parents' money, like the sirens of Greek mythology, all in the name of selling confectionary goodness.

For 40-year-old Bob Leach, who grew up in Point Pleasant Beach and currently resides in Point Pleasant with his wife, Noreen, and their two children; Bob, 5, and Maggie Rose, 2, it's the joy ice cream gives people that led him to buy an old ice cream truck in September 2011 and launch Whitecaps Coastal Mobile Creamery.

He started the mobile creamery last summer, fulfilling his dream of not only being a small business owner but also giving back to the community in which he grew up by serving one of life's greatest treats with a side of happiness.

Besides running Whitecaps, Mr. Leach is a special service teacher and JV boys soccer coach at Wall High School as well as an assistant coach for his son's T-Ball and flag football teams.

In addition to his work, Mr. Leach has run for office twice in Point Pleasant Beach, is a former corresponding secretary of the Fisherman's Memorial Fund and former member of Point Pleasant Beach Fire Co. No. 2 and a current member of the Free and Accepted Mason Lodge [Durand Lodge] in Point Pleasant Beach.

For Mr. Leach, opening Whitecaps was the result of finally going after a goal that has been always been in the back of his mind.

"Owning a business is something that I've always wanted to do," he said. "Since being one of the last paper boys in the area at the age of 12, where I had to be self-motivated to get out there early on weekend mornings, establish relationships with the customers, solicit new accounts and deliver the papers, coupled with being the son and grandson of entrepreneurs, I have always had an underlying desire to start my own business."

After dabbles in politics and pursuing a law degree, Mr. Leach transitioned into teaching, he said.

"While teaching, I always needed some form of supplemental income in the summer," Mr. Leach said. "For over 10 summers, starting in 2003, I worked at Red's Lobster Pot, but I always had a desire to do my own thing. I had various business ideas, but for some reason ice cream kept resurfacing."

Originally, Mr. Leach envisioned a brick-and-mortar business, but was aware of the steep competition he'd face in the form of the multiple well-established ice cream shops in the Shore area.

"So then I thought of an ice cream truck, but not just any ice cream truck – a soft serve ice cream truck, where I can serve fresh soft serve cones and cups, custom made milkshakes and delicious sundaes, all while offering up standard

Photos

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Point Pleasant resident and Wall High School coach Bob Leach is pursuing his dream of owning a business with his mobile ice cream truck. *Photo courtesy BOB LEACH*

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ice cream truck products such as novelties and Italian ice,” Mr. Leach said.

Once Mr. Leach purchased his truck in 2011, he came across various obstacles that impeded him from getting Whitecaps off the ground earlier, including the 2012 arrival of Superstorm Sandy. However, Mr. Leach was able to use his truck to help others in their time of need.

“Throughout that first winter [in 2011], with a great deal of help from my dad Curt, we focused on replacing practically everything mechanical in the truck; engine, exhaust, tires, wiring, etc.,” Mr. Leach said. “Then during Sandy, before I was even able to establish the ice cream business, I used the old generator to power up mine and four of my neighbors’ houses in the mornings and evenings, while taking out the truck during the day to pump out people’s basements and crawl spaces free of charge.”

Following the storm, the generator blew out and needed replacing, Mr. Leach said. He spent the next year replacing it and making other improvements to his truck until last July, when he was finally able to get Whitecaps up and running.

One of the benefits of having an ice cream truck, according to Mr. Leach, is that it is such a recognizable symbol of happiness that it is easy for him to help out people at the various charitable events he attends.

“Ice cream and an ice cream truck itself is a good, old-fashioned American symbol of happiness,” Mr. Leach said. “I’m in the smile business every bit as much as I am in the ice cream business. The two things go hand in hand.”

As soon as Mr. Leach got Whitecaps off the ground last summer, he started bringing the truck to charitable events in the area.

“Within the first two weeks of receiving my permit, I donated my services to all the children, their friends and the many volunteers at the Point Pleasant Elks handicapped picnic, and shortly I after that I did the same with the Point Pleasant Police summer youth camp,” Mr. Leach said.

Mr. Leach had made himself available to many individual and school fundraisers as well as community organizations, groups and teams who “just wanted to do something different to give their members a reason to smile,” he said.

The idea of a business serving the community is something Mr. Leach witnessed first-hand growing up and is something that he had to do with his ice cream truck.

“Growing up in Point Pleasant Beach, with family roots in both Point Pleasant Beach and Bay Head, and now living in Point Pleasant, I witnessed first hand the charitable efforts of home-grown businesses like Jersey Mike’s, Jenkinson’s, Joe Leone’s and the multitudes of small businesses and individuals who are there for the community time and time again,” Mr. Leach said. “It’s an asset to have people like that living here and constantly giving back.

“It’s what makes our communities great, and it is a privilege just to have the opportunity to contribute to that culture and spirit in the community,” he added.

While being aware of his spirit of entrepreneurship, deep down, Mr. Leach had a passion for another form of public service: teaching, which is something he feels came naturally to him.

“Before entering the teaching field permanently, I was a substitute for several years,” he said. “Although I really wanted to go to law school, and did while working for a law firm in Newark, I had a gut feeling that the field of education was truly where I belonged.”

He first taught in Perth Amboy in 2005 and started working in Wall in 2006, where he remains today.

Along with teaching and running a business, coaching has, for a long time, been something that is a part of Mr. Leach’s life.

“It [coaching] provides a sort of ‘fountain of youth’ for me,” he said. “And now I’m getting an even better appreciation for in seeing my son start to get involved in sports.”

Mr. Leach coached on and off through the 2000s in Point Pleasant Beach until starting in Wall in 2006.

“Since being at Wall, I’ve continued on with middle school wrestling and I also helped out with freshman baseball for a couple of seasons and have been coaching the JV boys soccer team since 2008,” he said.

What drives Mr. Leach to help people and serve his community, whether through his ice cream truck, teaching or coaching, is something that has been instilled in him since he was a child by seeing his grandparents, Bill and Helen Leach, being involved with the community.

“You see everyone around the community constantly contribute and do their part in sustaining a culture of giving, and you just feel inspired to go above and beyond,” Mr. Leach said.

Mr. Leach said the spirit and desire to help others is not only inside of him but the Jersey Shore community as a whole, which was evident in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, which “brought out the best in everyone.”

“Clearly, the spirit of giving back in the community is embedded in our way of life here at the Shore, and Sandy was a strong testament to that,” Mr. Leach said. “I think it came very natural to all of us to do something when disaster struck.

“Although the willingness to help others in need as always been here, I'm amazed at how quickly members in the community mobilized for someone in bad health or families that have suffered some sort of misfortune since Sandy,” he added. “I like to call it the ‘spirit of Sandy,’ and one of my goals is to have Whitecaps embrace that spirit right here in our community and hopefully beyond.”

Even though Mr. Leach sees his ice cream truck as “young and vulnerable” and a work in progress, it is the “invaluable support” of his family that has kept him motivated and seeing “no limit” to the potential of his business.

“For the immediate time, I'm focusing on Whitecaps getting more name recognition and reaching as many customers as possible in northern Ocean and into southern Monmouth counties,” Mr. Leach said, which includes working on marketing strategies, publishing an interactive website and figuring out ways he can run the business more effectively and efficiently.

He also aims to increase the number of private parties and public functions that Whitecaps currently does.

“Beyond that, I can see adding another truck or trailer, maybe even a hard location a few years down the road,” he said. “But I'm perfectly content with slowly growing – one cone, one milkshake and one smile at a time.”

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