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CHAGRIN FALLS

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THE HENRYS ON A MISSION

Cover photo by Dawn Weitzel-Talarico



Best Version Media

*Michael, Emery, Ryerson,
Michaela, Charlie*

The Henrys On A Mission

[By Mark T Baxter, Content Coordinator | Pictures by Dawn Weitzel-Talarico]

Life has gone full circle for Michael Henry – growing up in South Russell, he recently returned to the neighborhood with his family after spending many years out of state and abroad including seven years in Haiti.

Today, Mike, 39, and his wife, Michaela, 36, are settling into the new home they recently bought in which to raise their three children – Charlie, seven, Ryerson, five, and three-year-old Emery.

Mike's first year of life was spent in Lakewood, but his parents moved east and eventually settled in South Russell, where he went through Chagrin Falls schools before earning a bachelor's degree in economics at John Carroll University.

"I have many fond memories growing up here but I was overall an average student and an average athlete" he said. I eventually found my place on the football team as a kicker. That one season as a senior had a big impact on my life – my confidence grew exponentially and I went on to letter in three sports that year." Mike

went on to play football as a kicker all the way through college.

"I played soccer in elementary, middle and high school before switching to football. It took a while but I discovered I was better at just kicking rather than running and kicking," he said with a laugh.

Chicago was home for Michaela before her family moved to Columbus when she was 10. Also a dedicated soccer player, she enjoyed the sport all the way through high school – even beating Chagrin Falls in a state competition – and throughout her college years at Miami University, where she earned her degree in psychology with a minor in special education."

Michaela spent a year as a summer counselor and outdoor education teacher with YMCA Camp Kern in Oregonia, Ohio, before starting a master's of education in school counselling at John Carroll – though Mike and Michaela had not met as Mike had signed up with the Peace Corps.

"I went to Haiti for two years as a volunteer small business advisor," said Michael. "I worked with small groups of farmers and agricultural cooperatives and helped them to organize and apply for funding for irrigation systems. I also taught HIV and AIDS education and a bit of English."



Ryerson
and
Emery

"It was a big commitment, but it went by so fast. I wasn't happy going to Haiti at first as I wanted to go to Africa but soon discovered the many similarities and great need in Haiti."

The experience was lifechanging. "I learned a lot," Mike said. "I fell in love with the people and was blown away with how happy people can be while they had so little."

In 2005 Michael visited an old university friend, Kevin Fink, Michaela's older brother, who lives in Auburn. "I just stopped by to watch football one day, and she was there," said Mike.

Michaela reminds Mike he had to ask her brother's permission before dating her. "He told Mike that he was the only one of his friends he would allow to do that," she said. "And he told him not to screw it up."

Their budding relationship was destined to be long-distance as Mike had been offered a job with a non-profit back in Haiti on a contract for a government agency.

"I was to manage distribution logistics for an HIV program to deliver lab supplies across Haiti."

Michael was in Haiti for another two years, being promoted to project manager, and the pair were coping with an international relationship.

The couple decided to move and meet in Fort Lauderdale in Florida, as it would allow Michaela to pursue her school counselling career and let Michael continue in his career path since Haiti was a short flight away.

"I spent more time in Haiti than Florida," said Michael, who estimates he has lived seven years in the country altogether and has built up fluency in Haitian Creole and can 'get by' in French.

stay, Michael found himself caught up within hours in the devastating earthquake that rocked the country.

"My building was the only one on the street that didn't collapse," he said. "I was about to run out and realized the internet was still connected. I took my laptop and fortunately managed to get a brief Skype call to Michaela to tell her I was ok and alive before the whole country lost communications."

"It still gives me chills. There is really little you can do when there is no electricity and it suddenly goes dark." Thanks to a satellite phone he managed to keep some contact with Michaela but he remained on the island for another month to help with relief efforts before making it home to regroup.

Michaela said: "Eventually it was time to come back home to Ohio. There was a lot to love about our situation in Florida but Mike is from a large family and had been missing his relatives for many years." Mike added "There is just no better place to raise kids at the end of the day."

They returned to Northeast Ohio five years ago, just after their daughter Ryerson was born. They love what might be their forever home in Lake Louise.

Today Michael has put his business knowledge and experience to good use and finally established the real

estate sales business he originally planned with Keller Williams Realty and his team, HG Agents.

Michaela is full time mom to their three children and volunteering with their schools, as well as supporting the real estate business – the couple joke about the wages she does not get paid.

She said: "We love this neighborhood. It is so beautiful. We overlook the lake, the children love kayaking,



Charlie



Michael and Michaela

Continued from Previous Page

fishing, playing on the beach, and hiking in the woods.”

“We saw the potential in this house and now we are in the midst of a lot of projects.”

They are both active in the community, and Michael gives time to several causes. He sits on the boards of Hope for Kids-Geauga, supporting children suffering from abuse or neglect, as well as The Lesotho Connection, which helps orphaned children in Lesotho which is a small country landlocked inside of South Africa. Michael is also on the board of the Chagrin Valley Chamber of Commerce and is a dedicated member of the Chagrin Valley Rotary and the Jaycees.



In addition, Michael is a volunteer assistant football coach at Kenston High School – though he admits it was an unusual feeling at first rooting for his high school rivals.

“Now we are getting into the children’s sports,” he said. Given the parents, not surprisingly all three have started soccer, and Charlie also plays hockey.

The Henrys are regular parishioners at Holy Angels Catholic Church in Bainbridge. Michael credits the Jesuits for helping to shape him. “Their teaching is about service and putting others above self,” he said. Michaela added: “That has been the ribbon weaving through his life.”

Even with his business, Michael donates a percentage of the sales to a charity of his clients’ choice.

Summing up the Henrys as a family Michaela said: “In three words: integrity, perseverance and passion.”

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