

## Pechet family plans its return

Mayfield Theatre founders have long tradition of hospitality in Alberta

**Nick Lees**

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The first play he had a role in was *The Nerd*.

"I was in Grade 4 and the play needed someone whose parents would let them stay up until 11 p.m.," says Jason Pechet, who adds that he wasn't the nerd.

He had no problem with the late hour. His father is Howard Pechet, the founder of Stage West Theatre Restaurants.

Howard has produced more than 1,000 plays and is a candidate for the Guinness World Records for most plays produced by an independent producer.

Jason, 31, flirted with being an actor. But it's just as well for the family he didn't make the spotlight.

He and his brother, David, are ready to bring Stage West Hospitality back to Edmonton.

Some 30 years ago, Howard and his father, Eugene, 92 this year, opened their flagship property, the Mayfield Inn.

"Stage West Dinner Theatre quickly followed," says Jason. "We no longer own the hotel or theatre in Edmonton, but we recently decided to call our company Stage West Hospitality."

"Stage West has always been the most recognizable brand in the organization due to the success and long-standing reputation of the theatres."

Jason is now president of a company that owns Stage West Calgary, Stage West All Suite Hotel and Theatre Restaurant in Mississauga, Medicine Hat Lodge, Camrose Resort Casino and Stoney Nakoda Resort in Kananaskis.

The company has also partnered with Bellstar Hotels and Resorts in Alberta and B.C. ventures. It employs nearly 1,000 people and a conservative estimate of annual revenues would be \$60 million.

The family wants to return to Edmonton, where grandpa still lives and works.

It got its foot in the business door here this year by opening Violino Gastronomia Italiana Restaurant, formerly La Spiga.

"My father, a U of A graduate, really began his career here," says Jason. "We're



CREDIT: Nick Lees, The Journal

Jason Pechet wants to return to Edmonton and is looking for property.

seeking suitable sites for a hotel and to take over and manage other properties. We'd also like to have a few more Stage West brands across the country."

The family is so colourful, it would be easy to create a TV series or movie about the members.

Eugene, who still checks the company's books, launched operations in 1944 with the purchase of a hotel in North Battleford, Sask.

"He was selling clothing to people working in mining operations, but he'd always return to North Battleford because the hotel was the only one for miles around that had rooms with bathrooms," says Jason.

Eugene played poker with the hotel's owners and did a deal with them that gave him his first hotel.

"He'd run a 35-room hotel with a 500-capacity beer tavern and then sell it to buy another. He once owned 19 hotels down the Alaska Highway."

The Mayfield Inn came 30 years after the first deal. And Jason still laments the passing of Stage West in 1995.

"It was home to 125 productions and attracted more than 100 well-known film and television celebrities to its stage," he says.

"You couldn't attract those stars today. Sitcoms gave way to reality shows and the people still in sitcoms are extremely busy with their opportunities."

Eugene was also the founding shareholder of the Canadian Western Bank, which he formed with his son.

Howard, CEO of the company and executive producer of the Stage West theatres, now divides his time between business and helping non-profit groups in communities where their company does business.

After appearing in *The Nerd*, Jason got the theatre bug, and when he moved to San Diego at age 14, he took part in many high school productions.

He graduated from Cornell University School of Hotel Administration in 1999 and had planned on returning to L.A. But chatting to his dad, he was told the Mayfair Hotel was in a lot of trouble.

"I offered to come back and at the age of 22, I found myself running a 120-room hotel," he says. "It's different today, but there were prostitutes on the fourth floor and I had to teach housekeepers to spot drug paraphernalia, such as crack pipes and needles. I also had to deal with front-desk staff smoking pot."

He had planned on going to UCLA, but found himself hanging out with actors. "I had a lot of walk-on roles," he says.

"They made me realize you have to love the work unconditionally. I always had two loves, the theatre and hotels.

"I eventually packed up and left my place near Santa Monica for our operation in Medicine Hat."

Meanwhile, brother David, also a Cornell graduate, studied casino management and has worked as a dealer and pit-boss supervisor. He now holds an Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission's games manager's licence.

He is the company's director of casino development and has played pivotal roles in the Camrose and Nakoda developments.

"I am so proud what I started so many years ago will be carried on with such

dedication and passion," says Eugene.

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