

# LIVING THE *good* LIFE

BUSINESS COMMUNITY PROFILES

by Maureen Scott

photography by Steve Uhraney

*Humble HOWARD PECHET of Stage West now holds the Guinness World Record as "The Most Prolific Theatre Producer"*

If Stage West Executive Producer Howard Pechet stacked up the playbills from every play he has produced, the pile would be higher than his 6-foot frame: over 1,000 plays, employing 4,531 actors, over 48,000 support staff and entertaining 2.2 million people. Enough plays to earn him the new Guinness World Record for the most plays produced in the world!

Howard's wife Henriette surprised him recently by throwing a 60th birthday party. In front of a room of about 300 family and friends, a group of cheerleaders bounced in and did a "shout out" announcing that Howard E. Pechet now holds the Guinness World Record (Canada) as "The Most Prolific Theatre Producer, who has produced 485 plays at ten different venues across Canada, between January 1975 and July 2008."

Receiving the news of the Guinness Record at his birthday party was bittersweet. Howard's beloved father Eugene, a renowned Canadian hotelier, had passed away just a week before, at the age of 92. "My father would have been so proud to see our theatres recognized in this way," says Howard.

The Pechets own one of the few family-run hotel and theatre companies in the country. In 2003, Stage West All-Suite Hotel in Mississauga was named Hotel of the Year, the first independent hotel to win the distinguished title.

Howard's two sons now run the business: Jason is president of Stage West Hospitality while David is director of Casino Operations. The Pechets recently opened two casino resort properties in Alberta; they also own the Medicine Hat Lodge and Stage West Calgary and Mississauga. With his father and sons, Howard has owned and/or operated over 30 hotels, theatres and casinos across North America since the 1970s.

Asked about the success formula behind Stage West, Howard replied, "Good food, good price, good productions; you have to do all of the pieces well." And employ some big name TV and stage stars: the likes of Ginger Rogers, Mickey Rooney, Don Knotts, Tom Poston, Cloris Leachman and almost the entire cast of M\*A\*S\*H including Jamie Farr, William Christopher, Larry

Linville, Gary Burghoff and Loretta Switt have graced the stage.

"I learned that the ones going up and the ones going down can be the most difficult to deal with," says Howard. "The ones who have been doing this awhile are more secure in what they are doing and really enjoy working for us."

In the 70's and 80's, comedies outsold the musicals, but now it's the other way around, according to Howard. "There's no Neil Simon or Alan Ayckbourn today. They just don't write comedies like they used to." That's one of the reasons Howard got into writing musicals, like the mega hits British Invasion I and II, California Dreaming, One Hit Wonder (coming to Mississauga this season), and is currently working on a Motown musical. "We were working with other people - producing their musicals - when I realized that we could do this on our own," says Howard. He and Henriette travel to New York and London at least once a year to see plays, often seeing two or three in a day. "Seeing plays are my passion; it is never work for me," says Howard.

The former Edmontonian now resides in Rancho Mirage, California. They also have a historic farmhouse in Henriette's hometown in Holland, and a waterfront property on Lake Okanagan near Vernon, BC. Howard is a founding member of the Canadian Western Bank in Alberta and a former Board Member of Interim Place.

You would think that hanging out with celebrities and setting a Guinness world record might go to his head - not Howard. "One of the most important things I learned from my father and my Uncle Arthur (film director Arthur Hiller) is humility," says Howard. Honesty and humility have allowed me to deal with the stars and their agents."

Howard walks into the theatre lobby to watch his latest production, "British Invasion". He notices the large sign in the lobby with his photo announcing the Guinness Record.

He quietly asks the PR person to take it down, at least until he's left the building.

Walk softly and carry a big stack of playbills.

GOODLIFE



**RIGHT:** HOWARD PECHET WITH STAGE WEST PRINCIPALS, MO HUQ, GENERAL MANAGER AND LAURIE WALLACE-LYNCH, MARKETING DIRECTOR

**BELOW:** HOWARD PECHET HOLDING THE GUINNESS CERTIFICATE.



## QUICKIES

FAVOURITE PLAY: "COMEDY: 'MY FAT FRIEND', DRAMA: '84 CHARING CROSS ROAD' WITH SANDY DENNIS (STAGE WEST EDMONTON), MUSICAL: 'PHANTOM' WITH COLM WILKINSON AND SARA BRIGHTMAN"  
FAVOURITE BOOK: "STRANGERS AND BROTHERS" BY C.P. SNOW"

VACATION SPOT: "LAKE OKANOGAN, VERNON, B.C."  
HERO OR MENTOR: "MY UNCLE ARTHUR (HILLER) AND L.A. AGENT BEN PEARSON WHO HELPED ME TO GET MY START IN THIS BUSINESS."  
WORDS TO LIVE BY: "SURROUND YOURSELF WITH WINNERS"