

Guest Column for MH Times: 2011 Leadership Excellence Award Winner Mike Johnson

All of Morgan Hill knows the Johnson Lumber Ace Hardware store on Tennant Ave., but perhaps many are not aware how generous the store and its owner have been to schools, churches and charitable organizations throughout Morgan Hill.

If an organization needs help, whether it is paint or a donation, owner Mike Johnson almost always finds a way to give support. It is his nature and his tradition. Mike's father, Keith Johnson, believed in supporting the community that supported his business and Mike wholeheartedly adopted dad's philosophy. Mike's contribution to the community isn't just the gift of hardware or a check; he is also a model for generosity, leadership good humor and positive outlook.

It is for these leadership qualities and his generous spirit that Mike will receive the Leadership Excellence Award of Leadership Morgan Hill at a celebratory party on Aug. 6 at Jason Stephens Winery. Every Leadership Awards gala reflects the recipient, so Mike has requested that the traditional tuxes stay in the closet. This party will be short on speeches and long on having fun, all with rock and roll music by the Usual Suspects. The event benefits Leadership Morgan Hill and tickets may be purchased on their website.

Mike Johnson's entry into his dad's business was triggered by Keith's declining health. Mike was finishing up his business degree at San Jose State, and began working in sales. Mike learned everything he could from his dad, who was a fabulous mentor and teacher. In 1992, they moved the lumber-only business from the original location on Railroad Avenue, expanded with Ace Hardware and become Johnson Lumber Ace Hardware on Tennant.

Mike took over the business in 1995 when Keith passed away. Two years later he opened a second ACE Hardware store in Hollister and four years after that a third in Salinas. In 2004, the site in Morgan Hill was extensively remodeled and expanded to its present configuration. Needing property for potential lumber yard expansion, Mike purchased the nearby nursery property and opened the Johnson Garden Center in 2006, another successful step Mike's business expansion.

Johnson Lumber ACE Hardware provides truly outstanding customer service. Mike believes that service is their sole product and concentrates on the entire customer experience: parking, greeting, attentive help, ample stock, competitive pricing, checkout and complaint resolution. He reviews his high customer service standards with all employees regularly and is very proud that they all really do "get it" and provide very high quality service.

This community leader grew up in Aptos where his mother Marilyn, a former school teacher, still lives. He loves the beach and all outdoor activities, surfing being one of his and wife Suzie's favorite pastimes. Mike met Suzie while in college at San Jose State in 1987, married her in 1991 and recently they celebrated 20 years together on a cruise through Italy.

The Johnsons three children are Brett, 21; Adam, 19; and Kaeli, 17. Brett is a hockey enthusiast who plays for a Club team at Santa Clara University where he is going to be senior. Adam just completed his freshman year at the University of Colorado in Boulder, where he golfs and skis (dad visits during ski season!). Kaeli is a swimmer, going into in her senior year at Presentation High School.

The Johnsons are a close-knit family, mutually supportive and true friends. In describing Mike as a father, all the kids and his mother Marilyn talks about how loving and caring he is, setting a great example and always being there when they need advice – or anything else.

Mike's philanthropy and community support is phenomenal. His one rule for charitable requests is that they must be local. When a local request comes in, Mike always tries to do something, finding some way to support the need. His strong sense of obligation to generously support his community is very much appreciated and has earned Mike the respect and gratitude of everyone that has been touched by his generosity.

Mike's enthusiasm is contagious; he enjoys life in general and usually manages to put a smile on the faces of those with whom he interacts. He always finds something positive to say

and has been tremendously successful in creating positive outcomes for his family, for his business, and for the many local causes he supports. Mike is a success story who makes everyone around him successful as well. He deserves to be honored with the Leadership Excellence Award as he truly is a community leader in every sense.

Congratulations Mike!