The Pacific Pearl is celebrating its 25-year anniversary... a journey of growth, imaginative ideas, and a ton of work for this beloved entity.

So, what does it take for a business to succeed? I posed this question to Michael Veselik, the paper’s proud owner, his answer taking me on a wild journey. You may want to sit back, grab a cup of java, and relish the moment. This is quite a story.

A young Mike and his family moved to Mazatlán when they were in their twenties. Mike put himself to work selling time shares, and making maps of the city and coupons for various commercial businesses in town... until he had a different idea.

In 1991, Mike saw the need for a community paper... a source that would inform the residents and tourists of the city’s goings-on. He imagined articles about the town’s colorful history and its residents, a calendar of happening events, and a way for the out-of-towner to find their way around. He would go through town picking up brochures, thinking how wonderful intimate stories could be drawn from their information.

In 1992, Mike’s job quickly became time-consuming... he sold advertising time, created contracts, handled the money, helped with layout, setup, and design. When it came time to disburse the paper, he would start at 3 am in the morning with eight thousand copies, and on his scooter, would deliver it to condos, businesses, and hotels throughout the city. But there was more than simply printing the paper. It was vital to follow Mexican laws to protect the business.

In 1994, Maria Isabel Neri played a huge role in keeping the paper honest with the law. As Mike put it, “She was the backbone, I was the driving force for our success. I wanted to put an honest paper out there, as fair as we could possibly be.”

I thought back to my question... “But what made your paper succeed, Mike?” He looked at me and told me to listen. He hadn’t even gotten started yet. He said, “You have to realize, I didn’t do this by myself. There were lots of people involved along the way. We constantly needed fresh ideas. Some of our ideas knocked it out of the park, some were short lived. But, it was this constant brainstorming for fresh material that would keep the community’s interest, and therefore kept the paper alive.”

As Puerto Vallarta and Cabo were coming on the scenes, Mike saw a need to further promote, spark interest in Mazatlán. He knew that it would be the service people, ambassadors so to speak, who would entice tourists to return home and tell others how wonderful their visit had been. So, just months into the paper’s first year came the inception of a contest called Sombrero Blanco. In each issue of the paper, there was a form for readers to fill out, voting for their favorite bar tender, taxi driver, restaurant, tour guides... any town service worker who had charmed, performed their service in an outstanding way.

On July 14th of that year, there was a grand award ceremony celebrating the winners at a dinner. Hats, trophies, and plaques were given to the top sixteen achievers.

Unfortunately, after one year, the contest was no more. Local governmental agencies lost interest in the idea and the paper was too small to continue the event without their help. However, during this infancy time for the paper, ideas were tossed around like a storm over the Sea of Cortez.

Still in 1993, Mike started an independent paper called the Mazatlán Restaurant Guide. This was a work of love and a great success, but when technology progressed, the separate paper was discontinued, and the restaurant information was included as a slide-in to the Pacific Pearl itself. Soon, hard times hit the country, therefore, the city.

In ‘94-’95, Mexico’s peso was devaluated. During these tough times, the Pacific Pearl was the only publication in town. To help with costs, Mike moved the office to his home. This, however, did not slow the pace of the paper due to the imaginations of Mike and those surrounding him. The paper moved three times to the house in 25 years.

Soon, Mike was introduced to a woman, Louise Madlin from Palm Springs, CA. Madlin was running an International Beauty Contest in Mazatlán, but needed help promoting her project. She used mostly local women, but if their appearances hinted that of Japanese or Philippine descent, for example, they would be labeled from that country. The paper agreed, and posted the beauties representing different parts of the world in a magnificent multi-page spread, helping to make the pageant a huge success. Unfortunately, Madlin’s disgruntled aid called immigration on her after the fifth year, and that was the end of the beauty pageant.

Listening to Mike talk of the paper’s history, it became clear that along the way, there were certainly unforeseen ups and downs. Disappointed by Sombrero Blanco’s short life, the paper, in 1994, started a similar idea called the Mazi Awards. This lasted two years, until it was clear once again... not enough interest.

In 1995, overlapping the Mazi Awards, the Mexican Federal Government of Health came to Mike asking for help with a program to endorse AIDS awareness. They wanted to promote it for a month during Spring Break. The...Continued on page 09
The group is now its own entity, but I was delighted to learn that he had been instrumental for its existence. Mike had a desire to help residents in town. Therefore, charities became one of the important missions of the Pacific Pearl.

During the ‘90s, Mike supported several charitable groups... Hands Across the Border was, in the late ‘90’s split into Friends of Mexico. The paper sponsored La Perla Art Show for local painters, and a charity called Shoes for Kids to name a few.

For about 20 years, The Pacific Pearl has donated bats and baseballs to baseball teams around town where money was scarce for the kids. It has supported orphanages throughout the city and its outskirts. The Pearl formed the Foreign Connection which later became Hands Across the Border, a charity to help children living in poverty. Chartles, and articles to make the paper interesting... the advancements required Mike and his staff to be a giant think-tank.

In 1995, John Amrock wrote a monthly column called Wines in Vines about locally available wines. Additionally, John would voluntarily train local restaurant waiters on how to serve wines.

During this time, a legendary woman came into Mike’s life... Jackie Peterson. In Mike’s words, “She was my mentor for how to design the paper, she was my advisor.” Jackie had been in the newspaper business for 35 years, writing for the San Francisco Examiner. She began to use the Pacific Pearl as leverage to start the Angela Perula Cultural events, supplying her newspaper with her A&E calendar. Additionally, she provided interviews with famous people and Mexican artists... essentially the movers and shakers of Mazatlán. Tragically, Jackie passed in the spring of 2012.

Sheila Madsen, a contributor for the Pacific Pearl, along with her husband, Soren, started an internet paper called Mazatlán Life in 2012. Their paper reports on cultural events taking place in the city, along with interviews and reviews. In the fall of 2012, Sheila approached Mike, suggesting that she would provide for the Pacific Pearl, a calendar of the monthly cultural events from Mazatlán Life. The Pearl would in turn, send readers to Mazatlán Life. She has become a true champion for the cultural sounds of this country.

In 2000, a charity donation center in the paper’s office was set up for visitors to drop off donations for multiple charities in the city.

After 9-11, Mike was asked by Marianne Bisatdile of Rico’s Café to help gather folks for a memorial gathering for the international community in town. At that time, the internet was scarce in town, but Mike had access. His part was to attract the American and Canadian community. He used the online Pacific Pearl to spread the information, for quick response alerts, events and meetings for consulates, charities and Mexican government.

In 2003-2008, Mike published an additional publication called, The Official Guide to Mazatlán. This publication used high quality paper, and included information for anything you would want to know about the town. Climate, attractions, security, fishing, tours, tourist tips, how to tip, lodging, maps, etc. Beautiful photos were included in this 207-page beauty. It had article after article to address anything one would want to know. It was like a goole in print for Mazatlán. He published 10,000 issues each year, donating 500 to 1000 books to the State Tourism Department, and the Hotel Motel Association. The remaining books were sold around town to tourists. Unfortunately, the booklet became too costly to print, so after...
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2008, it was retired. In 2004, the paper donated the design and printing of a brochure for the Mazatlán Orphanage in collusion with Alicia’s Sewing who made costumes for the Salvation Army Orphanage.

It was that same year when the Pacific Pearl published Cooking in Mexico, that was comprised of Christine Yerbic’s tasty recipes. They revised it the next year to include 50 more of her delights. These Mexican recipes were inspired by her love of Mexico, Mexican history, and cooking.

The first Police Golf Tournament at Estrella del Mar was in 2005. The Pacific Pearl made brochures, car stickers, posters, tickets, and patches. Unfortunately, it fell apart when influential residents of Mazatlán wanted to go in another direction. It was a smack in the face since the Pearl had already made an investment in time and money, but it didn’t slow down the Pacific Pearl.

The paper continued with setting up the Backpack Program for underprivileged school children. Additionally, it facilitated the Mazatlán Charities Umbrella Organization. This group determined what items, an example being shoes, went to different organizations to be sure that children would receive what they needed.

The next year, the Pacific Pearl was first to be recognized with a Certificate of Recognition for service to the foreign community from the Sinaloa Department of Tourism.

During this time, the Pearl began publishing a summer Spanish language edition of the paper for national tourists. The English paper was already online, but another venue was soon implemented.

In 2007, an online-only piece called Pacific Wave Weekly was started, pulling articles from local papers to read at a glance, the different news pieces from the week. This online paper is no longer available, but was produced in a format that was later replicated by the original version of the online paper, Mazatlán Messenger.

For some time, the Pacific Pearl purchased uniforms for Bicycle Tourist Police until the Police Department could do so themselves for their men.

In 2008, the Pacific Pearl sponsored a program called Citizen of the Year for foreigners that did outstanding things for the city... Jackie Peterson was first to be honored. I now feel satisfied with the answer to my question... but success doesn’t come easy. Ups and downs, disgruntled folks who want to put a stop to you. It takes immense strength to forge your way to the next great idea that will make your venture better and more entertaining. I’m in awe of how the Pearl keeps the fortitude to continue and not look back, knowing that there will always be another brilliant idea to try.

The Pearl has never missed an issue in 25 years. From 1992 to present, there was a time when a staff of 8 full-time employees plus 11 part-time were employed. It was a time of great growth. In Mike’s words, “In the years, the Pearl changed from a business venture to a family-oriented one.”

Today, the paper’s staff is three, plus its writers, but she still flourishes, providing the public with delightful articles, maps, a calendar of events, and continues to be on the stands around town each month in addition to the online version. Additionally, there is a group on FB called Pacific Pearl Online where members can post happenings going on in town... truly a living document.

Mike has great gratitude toward his advertisers who have stayed with him during the years. “I would like to mention them all, but there are a few who have been with me for the duration of our publication. Gringo Lingo, Shrimp Factory, Casa Loma, Los Arcos, Papagayo, Galería Óptica, Designers Bazaar, Walfre Real Estate, Vineyard Church have been supportive for all these years.”

Indeed, Mike has been blessed with the people and family around him. His fiancée, Bonnie, donates her time with the paper’s Carnaval t-shirt promotions. Donations from these sales help to supplement the paper’s print through the summer months.

Mike has two beautiful daughters, Kevy and Tara, and is blessed with wonderful grandchildren. If you go to the office, you will see many family photos attached to the walls around his desk.

When we finished our time together, he added, “The Pacific Pearl is set up for the community and charities, and donations for the needy. I still feel it’s a work in progress.”

Driving away, I smiled, “Oh, I now know what it takes to run a successful business.... a tireless person with a huge drive, someone who knows they cannot do it alone. Mike said it himself. It wasn’t just me, it was the people around me that made this work. No wonder so many places fail...who has that kind of energy?”

Congratulations, Pacific Pearl. For giving this great city 25 years of entertainment, and information and charity events for and about this wonderful city called Mazatlán.