

Spotlight on....

The passions of Harold Moffie

By Stacey Dresher
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For a prominent businessman, Harold Moffie Jr. is pretty down to earth. He sits in the cool, pastel offices of his West Hartford-based company, Connecticut Health Facilities, dressed down in khakis and a knit polo shirt. He self-effacingly wonders why anyone would want to read a profile about him.

"I'm 64 and going nowhere," he cracks.

But Hal Moffie has made quite a name for himself in the business world. He founded Connecticut Health Facilities in 1972 and since then it has become one of the most successful nursing home development and management companies on the East Coast. In 1991, he was named "New England Entrepreneur of the Year" in the health care field by *Inc.* magazine for his outstanding operation, which owns and manages nine nursing homes in Connecticut and reports an annual volume of \$50 million.

Yet the colorful Moffie is not all business. The father of five and grandfather of nine considers himself semi-retired now and spends his afternoons relaxing at Tumble Brook Country Club. He is a well-known philanthropist who gives large amounts of money to both the local Jewish community and to the Democratic party.

Friends agree that Moffie is extremely intelligent and honest, with a keen, if sometimes sarcastic sense of humor.

"Overall, I give him a very high rating," said close friend, businessman David Chase.

"I like him a lot and I respect him. He has a very sardonic sense of humor—a one-liner type of humor. He is bright, witty and very flamboyant," Chase said.

"Everything about Harold is funny," agreed Ronald Thurston, a colleague in the nursing home industry. "But the things I remember you couldn't print."

Moffie got a start on that sense of humor in Brookline, Mass., where he was born and raised.

Early on he showed a talent for athletics, playing both football and baseball. He still holds a record in "Ripley's Believe It or Not," for punting a football 93 yards during a Brookline High School game. He won a football scholarship to Harvard University where he was a record-setting football star—165 yards in punt returns in a game against Holy Cross in 1948. He was even drafted by the Chicago Bears.

After graduation, Moffie served in the Army Counter Intelligence

Corps. In 1952, he married the former Selma Wasserman with whom he had five children. The entire Moffie brood (two sons and three daughters—all with names beginning with "C") now work for the family business.

Besides his successful business, Moffie has a passion for the Democratic party. Moffie has contributed substantial sums to the Democratic National Committee. Well-known in political circles, Moffie hosted a reception for Al Gore in Hartford last year and accompanied the future vice president on a tour of Hartford.

His political connections nearly got Moffie a new career earlier this year. He made the short list of candidates for ambassador to a foreign country under the new Clinton administration. With both undergraduate and graduate degrees in Spanish and Spanish literature from Harvard, Moffie hoped to be assigned to the American embassy in either Spain, Mexico or Argentina. The posts were assigned to other candidates though, ending for now his dreams of a new career in foreign diplomacy.

"Was I disappointed? Yeah. Will I live? Yeah. Would I have inconvenienced myself (by becoming ambassador)? Yeah. My wife didn't want to go and that would have been a problem...But it was something I would have liked to have done," said Moffie in his slow, Boston accent.

"I know this," he added. "I am very immodest. I can't believe anyone could do a better job than I could. It's their loss. There's no one better to legislate and to lead than a businessman who has character and has displayed over a long period of time consistent quality."

A committed Jew

Moffie's financial contributions also make their way to the Jewish community. Although Moffie admits he doesn't attend temple regularly, he is an active member of several of the Greater Hartford Jewish Federation committees, including the Campaign Cabinet and the major gifts division for Campaign '94.

"He cares deeply. I wish we had many other leaders like him. He is very committed to the local community and its institutions. He is brilliant, has a terrific sense of humor and is very pragmatic. He needs to see things get done. He is a tremendous asset to the Federation," said Cindy Chazan, executive director of the Jewish Federation.

Moffie recently hosted a successful fundraising dinner at the Chabad House honoring builder



Harold Moffie Jr. is the founder, owner and operator of one of the most successful nursing home companies on the East Coast.

Robert Simons.

"I was born a Jew and I love being a Jew. I think in some ways the Chabad House is one of the best ways of perpetuating our Jewish heritage...I think their existence is our best chance of keeping us Jews," Moffie said.

Besides contributing an undisclosed amount of money to the Chabad House, Moffie helped build the structure five years ago and has become friends with its rabbi, Joseph Gopin.

"He is very helpful and dedicated. He is a very committed Jew...He is very humorous, but too wild sometimes," Rabbi Gopin said.

'I have heard him described as a bull who brings his own china shop.'

— Calvin Moffie

Besides his desire to tame Moffie's colorful sense of humor, Rabbi Gopin said he would like to see him join the ranks of the more religious Hasidim.

"One thing I would like to see is for him to become Hasidic. I would like to see him with a long beard and a dark coat," the rabbi said.

Wishful thinking on the part of the rabbi? "You never can tell," Rabbi Gopin laughed.

Despite his ties to the Chabad House, Moffie considers Tikvah Chadoshoh to be his synagogue and Rabbi Hans Bodenheimer his rebbe.

"He is a very dear friend of mine, whose generosity knows no bound," Rabbi Bodenheimer said. "He is very much involved with

the synagogue. He occasionally attends, but he is not a member. He is especially involved financially," Rabbi Bodenheimer said.

Nursing home mogul

Moffie's career in the nursing home industry was established in the early 1970's when he sensed the growing need for well-run nursing homes and long-term health care centers.

"I saw that (the industry) was eminently successful and with five kids I wanted to make money," Moffie said.

Today Connecticut Health Facilities owns West Hartford

on the board of the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Hospitals and Health Care, and has written about and spoken on gerontology and long-term health care throughout the United States.

Colleagues say he was a formidable association president.

"Most people probably hated him," admits Ronald Thurston, executive vice president of the Maine Health Care Association.

"This industry is dominated by good ol' southern boys and for (Moffie) to come along and say things are going to change, well, it didn't always go over so well. He wanted to get down to business. He wanted to identify problems and get them solved. He did not suffer fools well," Thurston said.

Today, as Moffie nears retirement, all of his children and several other family members are heavily involved in his nursing home business. The company's newest development, the Southington-based Alzheimer's Resource Center of Connecticut, the first facility in the state that deals exclusively with Alzheimer's patients, was the brainchild of Moffie's son, Calvin. Calvin has his own firm, C.A. Moffie Inc., but also continues to help in the management of Connecticut Health Facilities. Moffie's wife, Selma, a licensed nursing home administrator, has run both West Hartford Manor and The Governor's House. Daughter Delia Donnelly, an attorney, runs Connecticut Health Facilities Construction Co. Another daughter, Cathy, is the head social worker at the Governor's House. Cal's wife, Patricia, is director of nursing services. Daughter Carrie and her husband, John Riccio, are both administrators within the company, and youngest son, Clinton, is administrator of the Woodbridge nursing home.

"I have heard him described as a bull who brings his own china shop," laughed Moffie's son, Cal. "He is at once entertaining and a comic figure. He isn't a BS artist. He tells the truth."

"I do like having the family around," Moffie said. "In any family business a natural rivalry is healthy. But the biggest problem is myself. I can be domineering, difficult, abrasive, opinionated, powerful. I don't want to give up the reins, although I do delegate. It is natural for people who have been around the company for a while to hope I'll fade away. But it's my business and my wife's business. We built it up, I give (the children) tremendous autonomy but major decisions are still made by me," Moffie said.