



ALUMNI PROFILE

This Stoneham Ford Family is Big on Tradition

(Fortunately, coming to Middlesex is one of them)

In the Melkonian family, work and life are steeped in tradition. Four generations of Melkonians have sold Ford cars and trucks in the Stoneham area, and three generations have attended Middlesex Community College.

Alan Melkonian, president of Stoneham Ford, graduated from MCC with an associate in arts degree in Retail Management in 1975. Claire LaCroix Melkonian, who is married to Alan's brother, Mark, graduated in 1980. Claire's mother, Gail LaCroix Melkonian, earned her A.A. degree in the 1970s. And Claire's son, Mark Melkonian Jr., is currently a student at MCC's Bedford campus. Each member of the family turned to Middlesex for a different reason.

Alan, 49, went to MCC to earn a degree in business. He, along with his brothers Ralph, Ron and Mark Sr., took over the family car business from their father, John, who took it over, with his brother, from their grandfather. It all started as Reading Motor Co. in 1920. Stoneham Ford was established in 1927 and the four brothers now own and run it, as well as dealerships in Watertown and Waltham. Between the three dealerships, they sell about 6,000 vehicles a year and employ more than 200 people.

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Claire, 43, enrolled at MCC in early 1979, a semester before she graduated from Stoneham High School. "What I really liked about Middlesex was the flexibility it offered," she said. Hoping to be accepted into a special medical-technician program at Children's Hospital the following fall, Claire completed four semesters of college coursework in three semesters. "I took a full load during the day, plus night classes and summer school, and earned my A.A. degree in the spring of 1980," she said.

"Middlesex provided me with a top-notch education, plus the ability to do it my way," said Claire. "They let me take as many courses as I could handle, which allowed me to finish quickly, live at home and save money. My goal was to get my education and job under my belt before I got married, and I did."

Her mother, on the other hand, enrolled at Middlesex as an older student. "MCC was my entry point," said Gail, 68. "It was absolutely fabulous for adult learners. I started with one course and couldn't wait to take two or three more." She graduated with an associate degree from MCC in the late '70s and transferred to Northeastern University, where she eventually earned a bachelor's degree.

Twenty-one-year-old Mark has turned to Middlesex for a liberal arts education before he begins working full time in the family business. Although he considered enrolling in a business program, Mark recently changed his major to Liberal Studies. "I wanted to take the full array of courses – from music and drama to science and business," he said.

Mark plans to earn an associate in science degree and then join the fourth generation of Melkonians in the car business. He currently works in Stoneham Ford's Parts Department. However, his mother pointed out that Mark's first job as a young teenager was washing cars on the lot, just like his father and uncles before him.

Ever grateful to the communities where they grew up and have conducted business since 1920, the Melkonians are generous supporters of many local programs. Through their Ford dealerships, the family sponsors youth sports teams and supports high-school marching bands, the Stoneham Zoo and the Stoneham Theater renovation project.

Stoneham Ford is also the major sponsor of children's activities at Stoneham's annual Town Day.

Quite the family affair, growing up in the car business definitely agrees with the Melkonians. Patriarch John, now semi-retired, is still perfectly at home out on the lot. And for decades, Alan and his brothers stopped work to join their father for lunch at their grandmother Virginia's house in the afternoon.

The Melkonian family clearly has all the key ingredients for a successful family business: hard work, education, cooperation, and dedication to family and community. It has been a winning combination for 84 years, and probably will be for generations to come.

- Kathy Register



Three generations of Melkonians attended MCC (back to front) Alan, president of Stoneham Ford, his nephew, Mark Jr., Mark's mother, Claire, and Claire's mother, Gail

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