

# Michael O'Rourke creates a beauty industry legacy

**M**ichael O'Rourke is one of the icons in the beauty industry. Starting his colorful career as a hairdresser in South Africa, he then founded the **Carlton Salons**, a successful chain that he expanded into the western United States.

Since arriving in the United States more than 30 years ago, Michael has proceeded to create new and more successful business entities, including **Sexy Hair Concepts**. After selling Sexy Hair Concepts in 2006, Michael focused on his **Institute of**



*Michael O'Rourke performs non-stop at America's Beauty Show in Chicago.*

**Courage** and waited out his non-compete until he could launch his legacy line, **Michael O'Rourke Hair**. In just one year, the brand has grown rapidly. It was a delight to talk with Michael and his partner, **Nicole Pelissier**, about his passion and his new business. We are delighted to share our conversation with **Beauty Industry Report's (BIR)** readers. **BIR: Michael, what fuels your seemingly endless source of passion for hairdressers and the professional beauty business?**

**Michael O'Rourke (MO):** I come from a very poor background. I didn't get an education or many opportunities as a child. Originally, I believe that was what drove me to be successful and passionate about everything I did. I wanted to prove I could rise above my beginnings. I am so grateful to the professional beauty industry for the opportunities that being a hairdresser has afforded me. Now, my passion comes from wanting to give back and making sure others, specifically hairdressers, continue to have the same opportunity to reach their potential that I did.

**BIR: How does Michael O'Rourke Hair further your goal of taking the salon industry back for hairdressers?**

**MO:** When you buy, sell or use Michael O'Rourke products, you are supporting a company that is committed to creativity and education, but more importantly, you are supporting a mission to make a change in our industry and shift it back to the hairdresser and

the independent professional salon.

**BIR: You recently offered a limited number of shares of Michael O'Rourke Hair (The Institute of Courage LLC) to artists. What prompted your decision?**

**MO:** I wanted to give back to the artists and create a change in our industry. Nicole and I were discussing my legacy in the beauty industry. Everyone knows I am committed to supporting the artists, so I had to find a real way to help them in their lives. What shows I care more than giving them the opportunity to buy into my company that I put my heart, soul and name behind? Just as important as hairdressers making a great investment for their futures, as we develop our artist

shareholders, we will establish a critical mass of hairdressers who will buy, sell and use the products, and thus, our hairdresser-owned company will have the power to change our industry.

**BIR: Nicole, what is your take on Michael's mission and his decision to sell shares of the company to hairdressers?**

**Nicole Pelissier (NP):** I think it is a phenomenal idea. If I ask an artist, "Why did you become a hairdresser?" she might answer, "I want to work for myself, I want to earn my living by being an artist, I want to have a flexible schedule, I want to be in our family business, etc." Michael understands that, as being a hairdresser has brought him a lifetime of happiness and wealth.

If you look at the landscape of this industry today as opposed to 25 years ago, the changes are staggering and are not in favor of the

hairdresser retaining the ability to prosper in or start an independent salon. The entrepreneurial opportunities we still enjoy in our industry are being jeopardized by giant consumer corporations owning most of the manufacturers, distributors and salons. The choices artists still have will be relatively short-lived if no one does anything to change the path the industry is on. Plus, the professional hair care industry has to keep itself separate from the retail industry; the lines between them are becoming all too blurred.

That is where I see Michael's legacy. He is developing a family of hairdresser investors who own and benefit from the company every time they buy, sell or use the products. With all independent, like-minded distributors and hairdressers for partners, you can be assured that Michael O'Rourke products will only be sold in professional salons and the people who benefit from the company will be the artists themselves and our predominantly family owned distributor partners.

**BIR: What separates your line from the many salon brands?**

**MO:** Our products are amazing, but our major distinction is our mission to contribute to the hairdresser, along with my passion and commitment to changing the professional beauty industry to

favor the salon and the artist.

**BIR: Please take BIR's readers through your line and briefly describe some of the key products for BIR's readers.**

**NP:** Our amazing **3Way Hair Spray** and our pump spray volumizer, **Get a Lift**, a revolutionary root lift/hair reviver that can be used on wet or dry hair, have received huge buzz. Our **Moisture Madness Shampoo** and **Conditioning** formulas are great on any hair type; they are color safe and restore vitality and shine without weighing down the hair.

Our newest additions to the line in honor of the rock star icon that Michael is to our industry are our **Rock Your Hair** skus: **Spray it Hard** firm hair spray and **Size Matters** aerosol volumizing mousse. Michael's Rock Your Hair



*Stylists have the opportunity to invest in Michael O'Rourke Hair.*

products are all about big volume and expressing feminine power. The packaging is out of this world; the neon pink cans with the crystal hearts have helped make these our hottest sellers so far! Women are certainly attracted to sparkling objects.

**BIR: When it comes to working shows, you are one of the best at cutting, styling and explaining what you are doing and then tying those techniques into a product or tool. What is your secret?**

**MO:** I feed off the energy and creativity of the artists around me. The love and support that surround me on my little pod motivate me and drive me throughout the day! It is my blessing and honor to be there among so many friends. I feel the same way about my business. It is a true pleasure at this time in my life to work alongside my family and friends to fulfill our dreams and further our mission.

**BIR: What role do salon and distributor shows play in your sales strategy?**

**NP:** Trade shows are a very important part of our business model—they are the best place for Michael to meet the artists who support or will support our company. Michael working tirelessly on our stage all day helps us keep a crowd, which in turn helps us get product into the hands of thousands of artists. That is, of course, a major support to our distribution.

Trade shows have enabled us to really connect with artists and teach them about our company and our mission. We plan to keep going full force, as shows have been an integral part of making our launch an amazing success!

**BIR: What is your operating philosophy and how do you approach each day?**

**MO:** At this time in my life, I truly realize how blessed I am and how much I have to be grateful for. I approach each day as a challenge and a gift, and I encourage our entire team to do the same. We are all lucky to be working together and having fun while pursuing a mission we believe in. Of course I am also competitive, so I expect everyone to take their job to the highest level of success.

**BIR: How are you using the Institute of Courage to support Michael O'Rourke Hair?**

**MO:** I built the Institute of Courage nestled in the mountains of Topanga, CA, just minutes from the Pacific Ocean to show other hairdressers what can be accomplished by a

**“Our major distinction is our mission to contribute to the hairdresser and my passion and commitment to create my legacy by changing the industry to favor the salon and the artist.”**

hairdresser with hard work and dedication. I spared no expense on the facility to make sure the artists who attend a class there truly feel they are special and in the most amazing environment to grow themselves and their art. This year, I am hosting classes every other month. In 2012, we will host monthly classes. The classes are two days and involve hands-on cutting techniques with me, as well as business

building and personal development strategy. It is truly a life altering experience and a place to make lifelong friends and connections. We are working together with many of our distributors to reward artists with trips to the Institute of Courage. For example, **Gino Barbo (Salon Service Group)** sent 10 people to the Institute of Courage. Each person had won a drawing at a hair show I did in their area. The Institute of Courage has truly become an instrumental tool for our business and for furthering our mission. It has made a huge difference in the lives of so many artists. I am so thankful I decided to take the time and spend the money to make this magical place a reality.

**BIR: In a crowded marketplace, what is your point of difference?**

**NP:** We have Michael. Today, there aren't many creative professional styling lines left. Even fewer are lines that have an artist with so much experience and passion putting his name and hard work behind them. We are focused on creativity and styling, and we will do the hard work necessary to support filling that niche. It is a rare artist who doesn't believe in Michael and what he is doing as far as giving the artist an opportunity to join his company. It is a revolutionary concept in the professional industry, and we are all so proud to represent Michael and the legacy he is creating.

As far as consumers go, we are focused on female power and giving women what they want and need. Our new Rock Your Hair line brings our theme of empowering women to the consumer. Michael has even established a foundation for single moms in hairdressing.

**BIR: What is one of your favorite quotes?**

**MO:** "Argue for your limitations and you get to keep them," by **Richard Bach**.

**BIR: What inspires you?**

**MO:** I am inspired when I see the hope in someone's eyes, when I hear a story of how the Institute of Courage changed someone's life, when I see someone take the circumstances that God gave them and change them into something amazing that no one saw coming.

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