

# 2016 INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP AWARD WINNER:

## MICHAEL ESTRIN

Independent rep and industry veteran Michael Estrin has made a name for himself with hard work, extra effort and lifelong dedication, making him a worthy recipient of the *Residential Lighting Industry Leadership Award*.

In one of the most aggressive and competitive areas in the country to do business, you'll find one of the most down-to-earth businessmen in the lighting industry.

Michael Estrin, President of Estrin-Zirkman Sales, has been covering metropolitan New York and northern New Jersey with his independent rep agency for nearly 25 years, growing his business from a solo operation to a team of nine and counting.

His entrepreneurial spirit and work ethic guided him to take a risk in starting his own company, and he says once it happened, he never looked back.

"When I started my agency, I had a newborn, a five year old, two car payments, a mortgage payment and no income," Estrin recalls. "But I had a lot of faith in myself, and a lot of drive and desire."

And, as is proof by his longstanding success, those few things are all you need to get started.

### The Beginning

Estrin grew up in the electric business ... sort of. His mother's father owned an electrical supply house in Queens, NY, which he sold in the 1960s. Estrin's father and uncles then started a decorative lighting showroom in Nanuet, NY, in 1968, one of the first of its kind in that area.

But this didn't sway him to jump head first into lighting; Estrin went to college at Bentley University in Waltham, MA, and promptly got a job selling copy machines.

"It was one of the worst jobs in the world, but it gave me tremendous

sales knowledge and I was able to learn the processes to be successful," he says.

Eventually, he had had enough of copiers, and reached a point where he was offered an opportunity to work with an independent lighting rep. After learning in that position for a few months, he accepted a job as a house rep with Quozel, where he stayed for four years before starting his own rep agency with Kichler. That was 24 years ago.

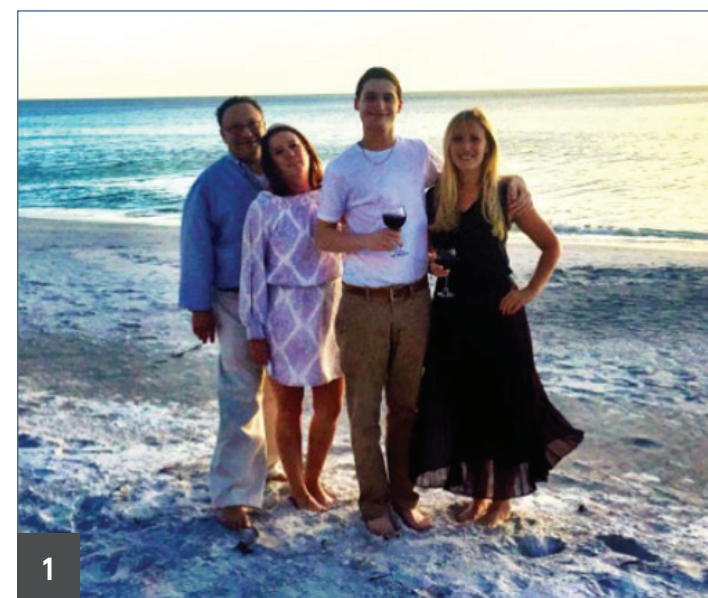
"I did want to join my dad's showroom, especially before I started repping because I wasn't as successful doing the things I was doing, but that was never going to be an option based on the business agreement he and his partners, my uncles, had," Estrin explains. "That was fine, as it benefitted me in many, many ways — I wasn't given a business, I took the risk to be an entrepreneur."

### In Business

The risk was worth it, and Estrin now has a thriving rep agency to show for it.

He's based his company, which reps about a dozen lines, on honest communication, excellence in presentation, and morals, ethics and integrity above all else.

"Every day, Michael brings passion and energy to his craft," says Dave Pamer, Executive Vice President of Sales at Kichler. "His intentions and the challenges he presents to Kichler are with one purpose — to make us, his agency and the products, solutions and services that we bring



1



2



3

1. Estrin with his wife Mandy, daughter Melanie and son Benjamin. 2. Nicole Bowling, RL's Editor-in-Chief, presented Estrin with his Industry Leadership Award in between stops at the recent Lighting & Fans in Chicago event. 3. Estrin and his wife Mandy at last year's American Lighting Assn. Annual Conference.

to his customers better."

Estrin has hired a talented team to help him carry out this vision.

The first person who joined Estrin's company was his wife of nearly 32 years, Mandy. In a day without cell phones, Estrin didn't have enough time to make all the calls he needed to make while also being out on the road, so Mandy started pitching in.

"I needed help," he remembers. "Neither of us knew it then, but she became an integral part of the business that way, and still is to this day."

Estrin and his wife have now worked together for x years, and she says it's pretty easy to separate work from home.

As for how it is to work together?

"He's proud of what he does, and that makes me proud to work with him in turn," Mandy says. "His kindness and generosity have helped him accomplish so much; just being a good person has gotten him to where he is today."

### Involvement

His willingness to help has certainly made a difference. Today, Estrin is the Chairperson of the American Lighting Assn. (ALA) Board of Governors and a member of the Political Action Committee. He also belongs to the National Association of Women in Hospitality and the Designers Lighting Forum of New York.

As for why he donates so much of his time to these industry organizations, Estrin has this to say: "This industry has been very good to me and my family, so giving a little bit of time I find personally satisfying. Being on the ALA Board of Governors has been a true privilege."

Estrin's efforts with and for the ALA have not gone unnoticed by those who he works with there, and the impact he has had will be longstanding.

"Michael has tirelessly worked on behalf of the lighting industry and is very deserving of this high honor," says ALA President and CEO Eric Jacobson. "He has led the association through some challenging issues and always used his intellect and keen judgment to positively affect ALA."

Even after the time he gives to organizations and his demanding work schedule, Estrin always finds time to spend with his wife and two children, Melanie and Benjamin, and his friends.

"My life is all about the seriousness of working and the seriousness of having fun," he says. And don't worry...he also says he's no where near retirement, so we will all have the pleasure of working with him for many more years to come.