

Port-of-Subs owner molds Sparks sandwich shop into 150 franchises

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

John Larsen's 36-year voyage as a purveyor of submarine sandwiches has been anything but calm.

He's faced some of the harshest seas a businessman can imagine – and took them, in character with his upbringing, head-on.

"You do whatever you got to do. I never took 'no' for an answer," said Larsen, co-founder and CEO of Port of Subs, which he helped build from a small Sparks shop nearly four decades ago into 150 franchise and company-owned restaurants in Nevada and seven other states across the West.

At age 62, Larsen has passed much of the day-to-day duties of his company on to colleagues while he oversees the broader mission of growing Port of Subs, launched with his former wife, Pat, in 1975 when they acquired the Sub Shop in Sparks.

But Larsen stays close to the wheel. On any given day, he's in his company office off Mae Anne Avenue in northwest Reno abiding by a lifelong belief in hard work and a tenacity never to give up.

"I'm still CEO," he said of his presence.

When the risk of sinking comes along, as it has several times over the years and most recently in the recession, Larsen has found ways to keep the ship afloat.

"I love the game," he said of business. "The word 'failure' just drives me. It scares me so bad. I just dig down deep and work harder."

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