



SERVANT LEADER

By John MacPhee and Irina MacPhee





LEADERSHIP DOESN'T ALWAYS COME WHEN IT IS NEEDED.

Sometimes it doesn't come at all. Great leadership showed up and chose to stay on Cape Cod in the early 1970's when Bob McPhee began his career as a builder. Just married at 22 and having decided not to pursue a promising sales career in the medical field, McPhee and his wife, Debbie, bet everything on Cape Cod.

He laughs now when he recalls his modest ambition back then. "I was focused... my goal was survival!"

A peaceful demeanor with a fighting spirit laid the foundation for Bob McPhee's business. There was no safety net in an industry that must survive many economic ups and downs.

When he first arrived here, McPhee worked for another company, but very shortly became disenchanted with how clients were not put as the first priority over business. McPhee understood that his client relationships came first. He wanted to connect with his customers, help them, and build "with" them, not just "for" them. He was learning at an early age that nurturing relationships would be at the core of his professional style and would drive his business into the future.



OPPOSITE:
(left) Bob McPhee, builder and founder of McPhee associates (right) Rob McPhee, builder, owner and executive officer of McPhee Associates. Building sumptuous homes while a primary focus today, McPhee Associates has blossomed while retaining its humble roots. Photo by Dan Cutrona Photography. Above: The initial staff at McPhee Associates, circa 1980.



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So, McPhee's first business was born. Bob leveraged his own savings and relied on a local banker who became a mentor and friend. From several initial projects, he was able to invest the proceeds in a group of rental properties.

However, while lucrative, renting did not offer the same relational opportunity. McPhee missed working intimately with clients to help them realize their dream home on the Cape. He not only loved the collaboration leading up to the day they moved in, but he also relished the relationships and friendships that endured for years beyond.

So once again, he steeled courage, sold his rental properties and set out as a self-employed builder. However, the economy was not cooperating. It was taking a cyclical downturn. McPhee remembers wandering around a property and wondering what the timber standing there might sell for. He was heavily leveraged; he needed a plan.

"I decided to build two homes on spec, put them both on the market, sell one and live in the other, depending on which one sold first." It not only worked, but 40 years later, Bob and Debbie still live in that "spec" home. "I like this house," though he laughs

and casually mentions Debbie has requested an update or two since it was built.

Through that and other ups and downs to the Cape's economy, Bob and now his son Rob have built not only many homes, but also an equal number of relationships, which he considers the true foundation of his company.

It's all about serving his customers, leading with a handshake and never cutting corners. "Everyone loves a good contract when things go well, but it takes a relationship to reasonably sort out problems," says Bob McPhee.

As an example of sustaining relationships, McPhee recalls building a home on Allen Harbor in Harwich Port for his childhood family physician in the mid 1980's. When the doctor died several years later, sold the home, McPhee was asked by the new owners' children to add on and remodel the house for them. Years later and those owners sold the



home to another couple who in turn looked to the McPhee's for further renovations to the home. To this day they continue the relationship with the same owners. When they sold the home, the new owners contracted McPhee Associates for another remodeling job.

As an industry leader, McPhee created a legacy home by serving multiple clients over generations. That dedication to being a servant leader is in the genes. Son Rob brings the same integrity, relationship-building skills and business acumen to the company. Like his father, Rob was no stranger to success before joining the company. Following college Rob earned his captain's license and for several years pursued a career on the water. And like his father, when he married, he and his wife decided to build their roots on the Cape.

Father and son spent a lot of time together. For many years, they shared the same office. "Now, that's close," laughs Rob. The result, though, is an uncommon confluence of knowledge and philosophy between father and son – not only about architecture and building, but also about how to conduct business and how to serve. The fabric of McPhee Associates is constructed from service, relationships, trust, confidence all wrapped in a handshake.

It doesn't end when construction is complete. The McPhees and their employees are always a phone call or email away from tending to a client's home, especially when they are off Cape. For second homeowners, this is often critical, especially in the winter. In recent years property management has become an important part of the company's profile.

Rob McPhee decided to create a property management division to maintain and manage customer homes. "We were doing this work anyway. Now we are equipped, organized and prepared for our property management clients," said Bob. "Rob has brought the idea to a new level that I could not and did not envision."

Meanwhile, Rob has become increasingly involved in building community along with building homes. He has been president of the Harwich-Dennis Rotary and the Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Cape Cod among other local activities. "It's about giving back."

Today, Bob McPhee jokes that he is "retired." For him, however, that means

dedicating himself to his newest venture with his son Rob, Windward East, as well as a condo-style development - a second generation custom-home development in East Dennis.

McPhee has more than survived. McPhee Associates is among the most successful custom builders on Cape Cod. Not forgotten is the humble pedigree upon which the business began. Today, his son Rob has assumed responsibility for the company to assure long-term sustainability. In today's world, where leaders emerge largely because they are the loudest, the roughest, the biggest or the wealthiest, it is refreshing and motivating to find a business like McPhee Associates that leads simply by focusing on their clients. Indeed the epitome of servant leaders. L



Facing page top and this page: **Attention to detail and excellent planning is only exceeded by outstanding execution and craftsmanship. Photos by Dan Cutrona Photography.**
Facing page bottom: **Bob McPhee, circa 1980.**

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