

## **Sheldon Mindell**

### **The Master of Reinvention**

by  
Brian Campbell

Sheldon Mindell has worn many hats over the years, often several at one time. In fact, he says that sometimes he has, “One head and too many hats.” But he has worn them all well. Educator, fundraiser, comedy club owner, husband, father, coach, pet owner, Sheldon manages to shift from role to role with the ease of a chameleon blending to suit its environment.

Born in Winnipeg’s North End and raised in West Kildonan, Sheldon has lived in several areas of the city, but has made his home in Tuxedo since 1980 and can’t see himself leaving.

Sheldon spent 30 years of his life in the school system, a career he enjoyed, but decided to make a change at age 54.

So from a career as an educator, Sheldon reinvented himself as a fundraiser, starting out as Director of Development at the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba. He was already volunteering on a JFM committee, and found out that they were looking to create a new staff position; someone to represent the Foundation to potential donors. Sheldon recalls, “I saw the ad and said, I could do that job.” So he applied, was interviewed and got the job.

He left teaching on December 31, 2000, took a holiday, and began his new career on January 15, 2001, the same day as his retirement party from Winnipeg School Division. “I started work on Monday morning, and went to the retirement party Monday night,” he said.

Sheldon is now what he calls, “a professional fundraiser,” and he loves it. One of the keys to his success is that he genuinely likes people. Sheldon says, “In order for donors to support what you are passionate about, they need to believe that you like them as a person.” Generally this is not a problem for him. To friends who are worried about socializing with a fundraiser, he says, “I’m not asking you for money, I’m simply helping you feel better about yourself.” Sheldon is very passionate about what he does, and it shows.

After seven years with the Jewish Foundation, Sheldon needed to expand his horizons. His wife, Tannis, was talking about retirement, but he wasn't ready yet. He said, "I need one more challenge." At that time Riverview Health Centre was looking for fundraising assistance, so he shifted roles again. He says, "I really do appreciate the chance to represent Riverview."

One of the things Sheldon emphasizes about Riverview Health Centre, is the variety of health care needs that the facility addresses. Riverview is a long-term care facility, however the meaning of long-term care is dependent on which unit you are a patient on. "In some units it means the rest of your life, in some units weeks, and in others merely days," he says.

For most people, this would have been enough to fill their lives, but not for Sheldon. When the opportunity came up to buy Gallagher's Bar and Grill in Tuxedo Park Shopping Centre, Sheldon and several others acquired it. The bar was already featuring the occasional stand-up comedian, so they renovated and reinvented it as Rumors Restaurant and Comedy Club.

In the first few years, the business brought more expenses than revenue and was at risk of closing. Sheldon soon found himself as one of the few investors brave enough to weather the storm and, eventually, the business turned around. "Some of the exciting side benefits of the comedy business was hosting dinners for now famous personalities such as Brad Garrett and Jon Stewart," Sheldon said.

With the death of the managing partner, Sheldon was now more directly involved than he had originally planned. So he put together a strong management team and carried on. Sheldon said, "I'm there often, but I don't have to be there every day."

2014 marked Rumors' 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a comedy club and in those 30 years, virtually everybody in comedy has played there. "We are very well known for treating our comics and our customers respectfully," Sheldon says. "Comics call us and ask if they can perform at Rumors."

Sheldon says that his business philosophy is to, "Treat people at least as well as I would want to be treated and try to make everything a win-win situation." At Rumors, that means when you come in for the evening, you should feel that it is your special day, that your being there is very important to Rumors. At Riverview Health Centre, that means to recognize everyone's contribution, no matter how big or small. "We should always remember to say thank you," he says. Sheldon admits to having a copy of "Whatever I need to know about life I learned in the sand-box."

With all that Sheldon has done, you wouldn't expect him to have spare time, but he has managed to find some and fill it. He says, "I have enough time to do the things I want to do."

Sheldon used to be an avid runner until the cartilage gave out in his ankles; he still misses it! He used to run in the Manitoba Marathon, but now does the 10 k walk on Father's Day with his son Drew and daughter-in-law Laura, while his wife, Tannis, volunteers at the event. So, due to necessity, he has reinvented himself as, in his words, "A poor golfer and a mediocre cyclist."

Sheldon and Tannis will celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this coming March and Sheldon refers to Tannis as, "The competent one." She, in her own right, was extremely successful in her career as a Deputy Minister and now is the Chair of the Board of Directors for Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries.

When his son was younger, Sheldon was involved in the Tuxedo Community Centre, coaching his son's soccer and baseball teams. Now that Drew is grown and married he no longer wants his father to coach him. Sheldon admits that he enjoys spending what little free time he has at home with Tannis and their dog Callie.

Callie was adopted from the Humane Society four years ago and Sheldon and Tannis use Callie as practice for grandparenting. Sheldon admits to being an animal lover and suggests that if and when he ever decides to retire, he hopes to volunteer helping animals in some manner.

Sheldon likes how convenient everything is in Tuxedo. He enjoys walking and likes the proximity to both Assiniboine Park and Assiniboine Forest. Tuxedo has a great selection of shops and restaurants and easy access routes to other parts of the city. Most importantly, the neighbourhood is very welcoming.

About himself, Sheldon says, "I don't take anything too seriously." His philosophy in life came from his father who said that, "If you want to make a friend close one eye; and if you want to keep a friend sometimes close two." An interesting outlook from a man who has successfully recreated himself several times over.