

Ron Joyce, billionaire who brought Tim Hortons coffee to the masses, dead at 88

Businessman built fortune after being chosen by Tim Horton to be his first coffee shop franchisee

Frances Willick, Michael Gorman · CBC News · Posted: Feb 01, 2019 1:50 PM AT



Ron Joyce, the Nova Scotia native who made Tim Hortons coffee and doughnuts a staple of Canadian diets and created a billion-dollar empire, has died. He was 88.

His family said in a statement he died peacefully in his home in Burlington, Ont., on Thursday with family at his side.

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- Steven Joyce, Ron Joyce's son said in the statement

"My father had a big vision and a big heart," his son Steven Joyce said in the statement. "Through hard work, determination and drive, he built one of the most successful restaurant chains in Canada."

Ron Joyce was born and raised in Tatamagouche, N.S. His mother, who was widowed at the age of 23, raised Joyce and his two siblings in a home that had no water, no electricity and was heated with a wood-burning stove in the kitchen. The only bathroom, Joyce told a CBC interviewer in 2006, was "a nice wooden one outside."



Joyce, left, and NHLer Tim Horton started their doughnut empire in Hamilton, Ont. (Tim Hortons)

Joyce left home when he was 15 and moved to Hamilton, Ont. He served in the navy and later became a police officer before getting into the coffee shop business.

Tim Horton, who at the time played for the Toronto Maple Leafs, opened his first store in Hamilton in 1964. When he decided to expand, he chose Joyce as the first franchisee.

Joyce said he knew "zero" about making doughnuts when he went in for his first shift.

"But by golly, I borrowed \$10,000 from the credit union, and I had to learn in a hurry," he said in the interview.

4,500 Tim Hortons

After Horton died in a car crash in 1974, Joyce took full control of the business and oversaw its growth into a billion-dollar business. There are now more than 4,500 Tim Hortons locations worldwide, including 3,600 in Canada.

Robert Thompson, who co-authored Joyce's autobiography, *Always Fresh*, called him "an icon of Canadian business."

Without Joyce, Tim Hortons as people know it today would not exist, he said.

"We probably won't see that kind of invention — somebody just create something that has such broad appeal across Canada that's so instantaneously relatable to the Canadian experience. We just don't see that now, and we probably won't see it again. And so in that regard, he's a legend."



The first Tim Hortons opened in a converted garage in Hamilton on May 17, 1964. (Tim Hortons)

Following Horton's death, Joyce started the Tim Hortons Children's Foundation in his memory to send children from low-income families to summer camp.

One day a year, 100 per cent of proceeds from coffee sales at Tim Hortons locations goes to funding the seven camps, which include one in the United States and one in Joyce's hometown of Tatamagouche.

Joyce also created the Joyce Family Foundation, which is focused on making education more accessible through scholarships and bursaries.

"In his journey with Tim Hortons, he travelled all over the country and considered himself Canadian above all else," his son said in the statement Friday.

"He never forgot his humble beginnings, with The Joyce Family Foundation donating extensively to support those who are less fortunate, especially children and youth."

In 1992, he was named a member of the Order of Canada for his work with children.

'Never forgot where he came from'

Jennifer Gillivan, president and CEO of IWK Foundation, said Joyce was one of the largest donors to the Halifax-based children's hospital, providing money for a rehabilitation centre and operating suites. He also hosted charity golf tournaments and auctions at his resort on Nova Scotia's north shore.

Joyce was known for doubling or tripling the bids on items at the auction, said Gillivan. But none of that compared to the time in 2006 when he had planned to donate \$1 million to the hospital, only to change his mind at the last minute.

"He saw a child being wheeled in to be operated on, and it just touched his heart, and he actually said, 'I'll double it.'"

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- Jennifer Gillivan, president and CEO of IWK Foundation

"He did the double-double of all time. He gave us \$2 million in that particular donation," Gillivan said.

"He was a guy who never forgot where he came from."

Aisha Gattous, who is in her last year of computer science at Dalhousie University, received a \$2,500 scholarship in 2017 through the foundation. While she never had the chance to meet Joyce, she said he played a role in helping her and many others get their education.

"It's amazing how much of an effect you can have on someone's life without knowing them personally."

In 1996, Joyce sold the business to Wendy's International in a deal worth \$400 million. In 2014, Tim Hortons was bought by another U.S. fast food giant, Burger King, for \$12 billion.

Joyce was also part owner of the Calgary Flames between 1994 and 2001.

'Whatever you can, help'

Joyce has also donated to several Canadian universities and has been awarded honorary degrees from universities including McMaster, Queen's, Mount Allison, Saint Mary's, Cape Breton, Calgary and the University of New Brunswick.

In a 2016 video interview with the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Joyce talked about the value of giving back.

Whatever you can, help. Giving can be many things. It can be money or just of your time, but all of it is very worthwhile, in my opinion.

- Ron Joyce, in video interview with Association of Fundraising Professionals

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But Joyce has seen his share of trouble, too.

In 2013, a woman sued him for \$7.5 million, alleging he sexually assaulted her in his Burlington home. Joyce denied that, claiming the woman was extorting him. That case is ongoing.

In 2007, he was in a plane crash on the runway of the Fox Harb'r Resort when the private plane he was travelling aboard encountered strong winds as it tried to land. Joyce owned the golf resort and gated community in northern Nova Scotia.

Source: CBC News

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