**Lockdown Launch & Four Years of Team Development : A Franchisee’s Story of Success**

Sarah Hassett, a McDonald’s franchisee based in South Auckland, opened her first restaurants after a pivoting from her career in advertising, only to find herself opening the doors during the lockdown period in New Zealand. Now four years in, making it successfully through the pandemic period, she continues to love her job, and in 2023 was the recipient of The Hugh Morris People Award.

Many would describe setting up a business during lockdown to be an extremely difficult journey, yet McDonald’s franchise owner Sarah Hassett says facing the challenges and re-opening to all of the nation wanting their Macca’s fix again, it was “an amazing few months that I will never forget”.

From starting her franchise three months before the NZ lockdown, Sarah knows a fair bit about social distancing and PPE, but her recent achievement of winning The Hugh Morris Award demonstrates the possibilities of growth as a McDonald’s franchisee and the importance of developing and nurturing of people in a people-first business.

The Hugh Morris Award is awarded by Kylie Freeland, Managing Director of McDonald’s NZ & Pacific Islands, and dedicated to the late Hugh Morris, well known for his great people practices and development of talent in McDonald’s. The recipient of this award demonstrates outstanding business results through their ability to recruit, develop, train, and retain qualified people in their organisation. This Franchisee and their people act in a way that is consistent with McDonald’s Values and Leadership Competencies. Employees witness the Franchisee and their leadership team investing time in people issues. The organisation uses rewards to recognise and differentiate high performance. Focusing on growing talent, investing in future leaders at all levels within their organisation.

After a past in marketing, event management, and advertising, working with big brands like Disney, The All Blacks and McDonald’s, Sarah then searched for the next step in her career. And after having successfully applied with her husband and being accepted into the McDonald’s franchisee program, her journey with Macca’s began.

“Leaving a corporate career to pivot into ‘flipping burgers’ was a huge challenge, but hugely interesting and rewarding” Sarah said.

In addition to her franchise, Sarah has been able use the skills from her past career by joining the McDonald’s Marketing Executive Team. Where she has been representing franchisees alongside four other operators in all things marketing and strategy in New Zealand, something Sarah describes as a great achievement during her time with McDonald’s.

“I love being close to the exciting global initiatives, agency ideas and analytics that makes Macca’s so unique and clever. It’s a real privilege and highlight to be involved in this area” Sarah explained.

Now four years in, Sarah is proud of her Massey Road and Papatoetoe restaurants and franchise, and how far she and her husband come both come as franchisees. Reflecting on her time in the position, she shared her favourite aspect of the job:

“The diversity! I’ll be serving customers, making McFlurries, water blasting signage, and then reading a marketing strategy all in one day! “ she said.

Alongside this, Sarah also highlighted how she loves the positive influence they have on their staff at all ages and stages in life. Getting to know their team, and families, and understanding their ‘why’ was an unexpected highlight she really enjoys.

“I love working alongside my Crew to develop their goals, both at Macca’s, and beyond, and to understand what is important to them. I also love to see their confidence grow, as they become more capable and confident as part of our team. It makes me very proud to see them hitting training and development goals and having big wins in our restaurants and that’s what makes it so special.” She explained.

Sarah also highlighted how proud they are of the franchise’s support of the local community groups, sporting teams, and the Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC).

“It’s a very heart-warming cause [RMHC] and one that has a long-shared history with Macca’s, and one we are extremely proud to support” she said.

As a recipient of The Hugh Morris People Award, Sarah has been celebrated for her outstanding business results, people practices and development of talent in McDonald’s. Sarah’s journey of working through an extraordinary time opening during a lockdown, to growing the franchise while developing her individual career is highly commended by McDonald’s, and inspiring to others of the possibilities and opportunities available as a franchisee.