



BusinessPeople

5 QUESTIONS WITH... **MIKE CONLEY**

Article by Michele DeVinney • photo by Steve Vorderman • Oct. 2010

Mike Conley is a Fort Wayne Renaissance man. His day jobs include the Sowles Bay Yacht Club, which he co-owns with his mother, and Business Investment Brokers, where he specializes in mergers and acquisitions. But to many, Conley is better known as a steadily-employed musician performing regionally in a remarkable number of configurations—solo acoustic, a duo with best friend Chris Dodds and as lead singer of the jazzy Beef Manhattans. His long-awaited Christmas album was released last year, and his plan to run for political office has finally seen fruition, as well, with his current campaign for 2nd District Allen County Council. On top of that, he continues to host Open Mic Night at the Mad Anthony Brewery. While that schedule might prove daunting to some, Conley thrives on his many opportunities to stay in touch with the people of Fort Wayne and Allen County.

Q1 How was your musical sensibility shaped your approach to business?

Musicians are often underrated. Think about the average CD—there are maybe 13 songs on it? Musicians write and create those songs, and it's really difficult. I've done two CDs now, and I'm really proud of that because I know how hard it is. Musicians are oftentimes brilliant, and while I'm not necessarily putting myself in there, I do think that it has opened up my thought process. It's not just musicians either, artists and poets have a different way of thinking, which I think opens up your thinking to new ideas. I consider myself very fortunate to be a musician.

Q2 Music and politics have long been intertwined. What makes the combination so appealing to you?

Music really is a universal language so while people may have very different opinions on some topics, one thing that brings the world together is music. We can look at each other and say that we love Billy Joel or we love Dave Matthews or a particular song and it brings us together. The interesting thing about politics is that it involves very strategic thinking—you have to know what the domino effect will be when you do something, and I believe that's something that comes with the creative thought process of being a musician too. When I released my first CD, people would come up to me and ask about a particular song “Did that really happen to you?” Well, no, it might not have happened to me, but when I write, I'm often able to put myself in different situations and I try to see things from someone else's perspective. I can imagine what I might have done in that situation and I think that's a big part of what it takes to be a politician.

Q3 What new music projects do you have in the works?

I had been planning my Christmas CD for a long time, and I knew last year if I didn't do it then, I might never do it. I'm really happy with how it turned out and glad that I finally got it done. Looking ahead to 2011, I think it's time to do a stripped down solo acoustic album. It's really time for that because that's the niche I've created for myself and the way most people think of me and my music. So that's what I hope to see happen in the next couple of years.

Q4 How do you keep so many balls in the air?

I'm basically self-employed, so I'm very flexible with my time. The yacht club is seasonal so for 14 weeks, between Memorial Day and Labor Day, it gets busy, but then it cools off—literally—during the winter months. My brokerage work is really about communicating by phone or computer and going to meetings. I do Open Mic Night at Mad Anthony's and I try to perform regularly. They all tie into each other in a way because they're all relationship-oriented and people-oriented. I meet so many people through music and through my businesses and now as I'm working on the campaign. All of those things come together really well.

Q5 If the Beef Manhattans are channeling The Rat Pack, which Packer would you most like to be?

That's a really hard question, but I guess I'd have to say Dean Martin. Sinatra was, well, Sinatra—kind of dramatic, and Sammy Davis could swing with the best of them. Dean Martin had a sense of humor and was never afraid to be the brunt of a joke. I tend to be kind of laid back when I perform and he was pretty cool and smooth. Whether I'm doing solo acoustic music or performing with the Beef Manhattans, I'd like to think I am more of a laid back, smooth kind of performer—like Dean Martin.