

DOLCE



SINCE 1996

RAMI MALEK'S LIFE-CHANGING ROLE AS QUEEN'S FRONT MAN & ROCK IDOL FREDDIE MERCURY



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PHILANTHROPY WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

Fuelled by his humble beginnings and the recent tragedy in his family, Harris Rosen, the founder, president and chief operating officer of Rosen Hotels & Resorts, continues to pursue his commitment to making the world a better place

WRITTEN BY DONNA PARIS

Harris Rosen and his family live with a devastating loss. Last November, Rosen's 26-year-old son Adam lost his battle with brain cancer after 2.5 years. "When he passed, I had long conversations with the physicians who took such good care of him, and what evolved was a new paradigm for finding cures and treatments for horrible diseases," he says. "I was so intrigued by that new template that I thought I would offer my assistance."

The new paradigm is the ReMission Alliance Against Brain Tumors, a collaborative initiative led by the University of Florida, uniting world-leading neuro-oncology physicians and scientists in research and clinical trials. And Rosen's \$12-million gift is the cornerstone of this

In the wake of his son's passing, Rosen donated \$12 million to the ReMission Alliance Against Brain Tumors, which strives to find a cure or treatments through a collaborative effort

PHOTO BY ISAAC ARJONILLA FOR MVP

commitment. Instead of being competitive, the paradigm now asks for everyone to work together and share ideas, with the goal of finding a cure or treatments much more quickly than labs working simply on their own.

For a man who was born and raised in New York's Bowery neighbourhood on the East Side when it wasn't such a cool place to live, that is a very generous gift to give. But the self-made millionaire (his company owns eight hotels and resorts in Central Florida, including the 1,501-room, AAA Four Diamond Rosen Shingle Creek) remembers clearly the moment the earth shifted. "I had what I might refer to as an epiphany, sitting in my little office and dreaming about more hotels, when we were just ready to open another one," says Rosen. "I heard a voice saying, 'Harris, take a deep breath. Now it's time to say thank

you, God, and it's time to offer a helping hand to those in need.'" That was 26 years ago, and that was the beginning of the creation of the Harris Rosen Foundation. "That was when I knew that I was blessed beyond anything I could ever have imagined," he adds.

That was the start of the Tangelo Park Program, a model community with child-care programs, parenting classes and post-secondary education or training opportunities available to every child at no cost. Tangelo Park is located about a quarter mile southeast of Orlando's International Drive tourist area. It was characterized as a typical urban community, with low socioeconomic-demographic issues, drug problems, poor school attendance, declining test scores and elevated high-school dropout rates. But that was in the late '80s to the early '90s. Today, property values in Tangelo Park are up. High-school graduation rates (which used to hover at about 50 per cent) have soared to 100 per cent. That's not all. "Crime has declined by almost 80 per cent," says Rosen. "Hope is infused into the community, and children are now going to college like crazy and graduating at numbers that are unprecedented – 78 per cent of our youngsters who start college graduate in four years. That's unbelievable."

Rosen's philanthropy knows no boundaries, really. It may start at home with scholarships for paid-for post-secondary education for his employees (after five years with the company) and their dependents (after three years with the company) and with RosenCare, which provides



Harris Rosen being honoured by Oprah Winfrey at the Dream Academy Awards for his philanthropic Tangelo Park Program



Harris Rosen visits children at the new Rosen Preschool at OCPS Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) in the Parramore District in Orlando

health care for associates of Rosen Hotels & Resorts, but it also includes funding for projects in Haiti, for example. And the chance to promote education is always an opportunity for Rosen. Take, for example, the launching of a second iteration of the highly successful Tangelo Park Program in the urban neighbourhood of Parramore in Orlando, and the millions Rosen has gifted to start the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida – the largest, most modern facility ever built for hospitality management education.

So when an opportunity arose to contribute to The Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida, Rosen didn't blink. Perhaps this was precipitated by his college years at Cornell University, when he joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)

and volunteered to go overseas to Korea, then Frankfurt, Germany. His mother's family came from Austria, and his father's family from Ukraine, and they had some horrific stories to tell, he says. "I did visit Dachau; it was a life-changing experience that left me with so many questions," says Rosen. "Why would a civilization do what they did? How could they possibly believe that what they were doing was appropriate? It wasn't only one person, it was a whole nation, and several countries participated.

And that is something that I don't understand, never will understand. But I think that we, as a civilization, have to guard against that kind of extraordinary evil."

Rosen's greatest regret? "That I have outlived my son Adam," he says. "I would trade everything in the world if Adam were alive." But still, he considers himself blessed to be where he is today, wanting to help others in whatever way he can. "[The ReMission Alliance Against Brain Tumors] brings hope," he says. "I don't think my wife and three children will ever be the same ... but that doesn't mean that we can't try to do something that might benefit mankind."

And Rosen still has big dreams. "Our dream is that every underserved community in America will have a Tangelo Park Program, and then I believe we won't recognize America anymore," he says. "If someone would just say, 'Free preschool, free college, let's work with the folks there and give them hope.' Wow. Wow. What a wonderful change that would make to our country."

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