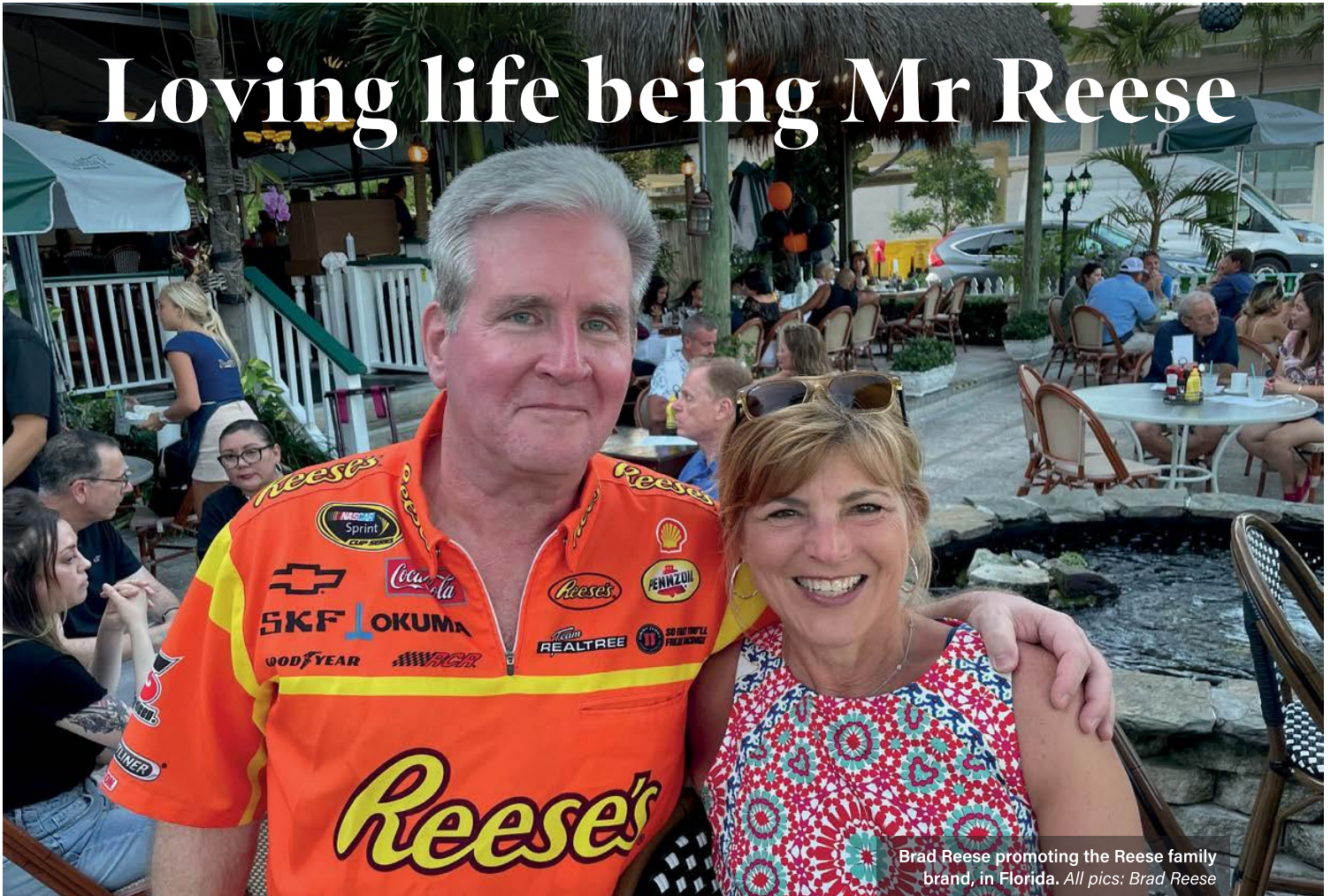


# Loving life being Mr Reese



Brad Reese promoting the Reese family brand, in Florida. All pics: Brad Reese

Being passionate about his family background, Brad Reese has made it his mission to promote his family's confectionery legacy on his own terms. Editor Neill Barston speaks to him on his eventful life and times

"I'm having the time of my life," beams Brad Reese of his experiences in coastal Florida, as he seeks to maintain the notable legacy of his famous confectionery family as a self-appointed brand ambassador.

As he concedes, he considers himself an underdog who hasn't always gelled with conventional corporate environments, though one thing is certain, his passion for candy – and his own family's remarkable journey in particular, is undoubted.

The 68 year-old is a grandson of H.B Reese, who founded the global peanut butter cup phenomenon which has played a sizeable role in driving the fortunes of its owner, Hershey, which generates a total of more than \$11 billion a year.

With Sweets & Snacks Expo around the corner, the company is expected to play

another significant part in proceedings between 13-16 May as the show moves to its new home in Indianapolis, with its famed peanut butter cups expected to feature prominently.

In occupying a coveted status as vying for the number one candy brand in the USA, Reese's has a very special place in the hearts of many Americans.

As Brad stresses, while he's not in any way an employee of Hershey, it's literally in his DNA to want to see the brand continue to succeed, and he gains a huge amount of enjoyment from meeting and chatting to fans of the brand.

"When I'm out I'll often be wearing something with a Reese's cap, t-shirt or anything with the logo on and I'll be mobbed, and the first thing they will say is that it's their favourite thing, and they

all ask for selfies," he muses on his life and times in West Palm Beach, with an understandable sense of pride.

As he explains, his move to the Sunshine state of Florida, was, in part, due to health reasons, noting that for the past decade he has been successfully battling cancer, which has required regular treatment, though he remains commendably upbeat.

Moreover, he says the lack of a direct relationship with Hershey most likely stems from having taken a vocal stance against a previous move to sell the confectionery giant for a reported sum of \$12.5bn to Wrigley gum back in 2002, which ultimately fell through.

The impact of that particular decision is uncertain, yet it's clear that preserving his family's heritage is something that Brad Reese cares especially deeply about.



As he recalls, he was less than a year old when his grandfather H.B Reese died, which indeed lessened the prospect of his ever being involved with the business – especially as it would be sold to Hershey during his childhood.

**One-man mission**

Significantly, as he explains, he sought his own path in life rather than take a family inheritance, instead serving in the military for several years before moving on to more commercial concerns in his later career.

This has included working for a leading digital infrastructure company, then trading



Taking shelter from the rain under a Reese's umbrella

As he notes, he's out on an almost daily basis gathering reaction to the brand's output. "I get people talking to me from many places, including people coming over from the UK, who tell me they're not seeing any adverts for Reese's. It amazes me that so many fans do not seem to know the depth of the product lines, as well as all the products that are made under licence linked to it," he says, observing how the company has branched out into avenues including breakfast cereal and other more unexpected confectionery areas.

**Long legacy**

Last year was in fact a major milestone for the late H.B Reese, marking a centenary of candy making, which he initially undertook after having been laid off from a role at Hershey managing its dairy farm, so in the intervening period, he is said to have followed in his mother's footsteps making sweet treats.

So, as the story goes, after he returned to another role with Hershey, he eventually struck upon his grand product vision after first creating a series of assorted candy that he worked on in his own basement, that led to him opening new factory facilities.

However, it wasn't until 1928 that he graduated to making his first wrapped

peanut butter and chocolate-based cups, delivering a true piece of confectionery alchemy in the process.

As Brad reflects, during his formative years growing up in the chocolate making town of Hershey, Pennsylvania, he felt a genuine sense of pride at his connections.

"When the Reese's advert came on TV, I would be really excited, as it was like my grandfather was talking to me," yet he feels that his family appeared (to him at least at the time), to be somewhat less emotionally attached to the brand. But what is it in his eyes that makes it so special, and a global confectionery force?

"It's just that they're so good. Even I can't eat just one. They came out with the Reese's Thins, and it's considered 'more permissible' – but it's not when you end up eating the whole bag as a lot of people do. They go on binges watching a movie, with a third of Reese's fans eating them every day.

"The magic is that it is perfection. What's interesting is that when my grandfather became successful, he got new peanut roasters, but the cups lost their taste. They couldn't figure it out.

"They used the same recipe and procedures, and they spent months trying to trouble shoot why it no longer had that distinctive taste. It turned out that their old roasters had been malfunctioning and burnt the peanuts, so they had to take the new roasters, and break them, so that they burnt the peanuts," adds Brad of the company's fascinating early history.

As for the future, he concludes that he would love to envision a day when the company returned to being owned by the Reese family. But for now, continuing to promote it in his own way has offered an especially rewarding pathway and means to re-connect with what is a remarkable confectionery legacy. ♦



Opening the new H.B Reese's factory in 1957, as demand continued to grow across the nation

in on the New York Futures exchange market, as well as being vice president of a mergers and acquisitions firm.

But these days, flying the flag for his family's famous brand has, he says, literally given him a renewed lease of life.

As he reveals, it's through his conversations with fans that he tries to enlighten them a little, which he's extended to an online presence which is known as the "Reese's economic engine" in reference to the key range's value to its owners.



HB Reese pictured in 1928, the year he hit upon his major Reese's cups, with his large family, including Brad's father Charles as a baby on his knee