

# Mike and Marlo Denning

Daytona Beach, Florida



Elegant Limousines

## *Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Mike and Marlo Denning:*

Mike and Marlo's story and their journey into entrepreneurship is proof that if you have a great idea, you're willing to work hard and you understand the importance of reputation and consistency, your chance of success is greatly improved. What started with an ant-infested 1991 10-passenger Lincoln Town Car pulled from a Georgia barn is now a 7 fleet limousine and transportation company that provides a first-class experience to thousands of customers throughout Central and North Florida. Mike and Marlo personify the true spirit of entrepreneurship.

They had an idea, they took action and they never looked back.

"Marlo and I first met online," Mike said. "We were living in Massachusetts at the time. I was a mechanic and Marlo was a Certified Nursing Assistant. We both wanted something better. My parents moved to Palm Coast, so I was familiar with the area. Marlo and I visited

during Christmas and liked it so much that we put all of our stuff in a truck and moved down in 2005. I proposed to Marlo on the front steps of our new home and we decided to get married in our backyard. We wanted to do a night out together to celebrate before the wedding, so Marlo started calling local limousine companies. She was met with rudeness and high prices. We thought to ourselves, 'wow, someone is getting rich driving people around for \$100 an hour'. We also thought we could do a better job and provide a higher level of service."

Out of curiosity, they looked at the cost to buy a limo and realized how cheap high-mileage limos were. With Mike's mechanical background, they knew they could buy an old model and fix it up. That's when they discovered 'Betsy', the '91 Town Car listed for \$5,500 in Douglas, GA. They got a personal loan to cover the cost of the vehicle and drove up to Georgia to meet Betsy. They also met Joshua Works, the individual that sold them Betsy. "None of this would be possible if it wasn't for Joshua Works," Marlo was quick to point out. "In addition to a great deal, he gave us suggestions on how to do business along with a reservation form he previously used." Mike fixed a broken alternator in the parking lot and off they were, as Mike and Marlo drove Betsy to her new home in Palm Coast, FL.

"About six months prior to Betsy's arrival, I started working at Mason's Automotive in Port Orange," Mike said. "After we bought her, the owner would let me bring her in at night to work on her. Some nights I'd work till midnight. Slowly but surely we got her fixed up and ready for service."

At the time, Marlo worked at a nursing home in Daytona Beach. The head nurse's husband built websites. Mike offered to work on his car for free if he would help build their website. Once the website was up, they

turned their attention to lead generators and marketed themselves as a "low cost" option to break into the market. Gradually, as businesses increased, they were able to adjust their rates to more competitive levels. They also got requests for airport transportation and different types of events that made it apparent they would need additional vehicles. Over time, they added a sedan and more limos with various features and seating capacities. They also added additional websites to help funnel more traffic to them. Most Google searches for limousines between Daytona and Palm Coast will direct you to Elegant Limousines. This was a very intentional strategy and one that more entrepreneurs should employ.

They got so busy that Marlo ended up quitting her job to focus exclusively on running Elegant Limousines. Mike was able to drop down to part-time at Mason's Automotive and focused on growing the limo business. Things really heated up when they were called to pick someone up from a private jet in Daytona Beach. "It was Jeff Gordon and his cousin," said Marlo. This experience and the time a drunk driver took out half of one of their limos are all part of the ups and downs that come with the entrepreneurial journey. Throughout it all, Mike and Marlo have managed to prevail and have done so with a very positive attitude and an eye towards the future. Marlo added, "Within the next 5 years, we want to expand our shuttle type services with mini-buses. We also want to be able to accommodate large corporate outings with more appropriate transportation options."

Mike and Marlo have some great advice for aspiring entrepreneurs. "You do not have to be a college, or even a high school graduate, to be successful," said Marlo. "You need to be dedicated and you need to work

hard. You need to be willing to shut up, listen, learn from people who have done it before and stay humble. The word 'fail' is also no where to be found in our vocabulary. We will not fail." Mike and Marlo are also very involved in their community. They teamed up with Pink Army to help bring awareness to Breast Cancer. They also do school supply and food drives for local groups.

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