

Bedding Today

David Perry
Executive editor



Lorelli's children's book travels a touching road

Mike Lorelli has had many successes in the world of business. He has dreamed up creative ways to get more Americans to drink Pepsi, and he has helped spread Pizza Hut restaurants around the globe. Along the way he's recorded hundreds of thousands of frequent-flier miles.

All of which led to another accomplishment: writing a children's book on the challenges that families face when a spouse is traveling. His book "Traveling Again, Dad?" features the artwork of illustrator Drew Struzan, who created the art for movie posters for such Stephen Spielberg hits as "E.T." and "Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade."

This is a delightful book. The illustrations are lovely, and the story is moving.

Lorelli, who is CEO and president of latex producer Latex International, got inside the head of the family's pet hamster — named Awesome — to tell the story.

Awesome says he is "the head hamster" in the house and admits: "We're all a little sad, 'cause Dad needs to go away for a whole week." He notes that Dad "explained that being away from the family now and then was part of his job. Lots of moms and dads have to travel for work."

The book shows how families can find positives when a spouse is on the road. The kids, Karen and Bethy, learn about geography by following their dad's travels on a map on the refrigerator. Mom shows them how to send Dad a fax at his hotel.

The touching fax is reproduced in the book. It's the kind of handwritten message from our kids that we should all keep near our desks at work. (A great drawing of a sunny summer day, done by my talented son Rob when he was in elementary school, still occupies a key spot in my cubicle at work.)

The story has a happy ending when Dad comes home and says: "It's hard to be away from you guys. But it's always great to get home to all of you."

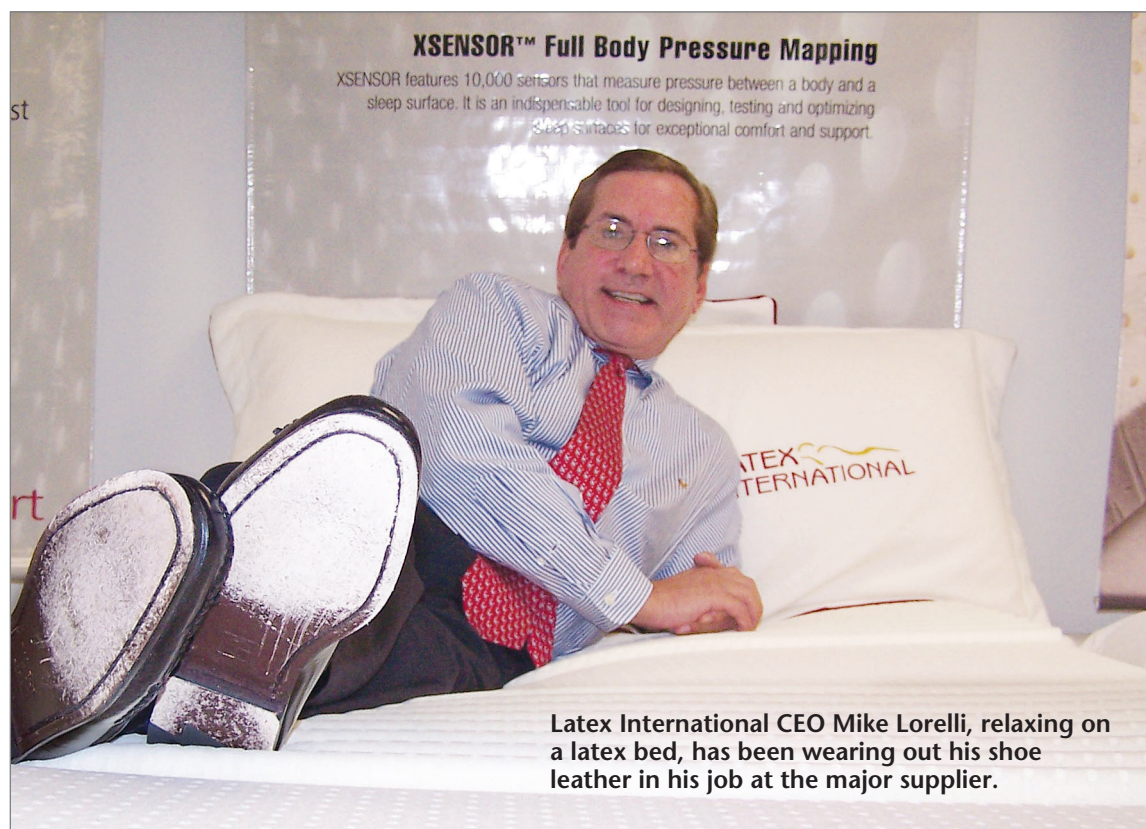
The real Awesome has now moved on to hamster heaven, but Lorelli's book, written in 1996 and published by Awesome Books of Darien, Conn., remains available from online booksellers.

Lorelli and Struzan continue to donate proceeds to children's charities.

We bring hardships to our families when we travel. It's nice to see a book like this turn some of those travel lemons into lemonade.

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Lorelli an appropriate CEO for high-flying latex maker



Latex International CEO Mike Lorelli, relaxing on a latex bed, has been wearing out his shoe leather in his job at the major supplier.

By David Perry

SHELTON, Conn. — "We've got an F-15 by the tail," says Mike Lorelli, CEO and president of Latex International.

He is describing the kind of growth that his company, North America's only producer of latex mattresses and pillows, has been experiencing. But it's an image that has special meaning for the licensed pilot, who has actually flown the jet fighter.

A certificate in his tidy office here attests to the experience. It shows Lorelli on the airstrip in his flight gear. He fondly recalls his time in the cockpit of an F-15, which he flew in as a civilian guest of the military. "That plane is

just a rocket ship," he said. "It's like strapping yourself onto a Roman candle."

Among his other flying highlights: sharing a cockpit in a P-51 fighter with the legendary Chuck Yeager, the first man to break the sound barrier.

"He is a wild and crazy guy," Lorelli recalled. "He says a pilot's dream is to have the same number of takeoffs and landings."

Lorelli, 53, has flown high in the corporate world too. For years he fought in the "Cola wars" as chief marketing officer for Pepsi beverages in North America. There he developed Pepsi's "big event" marketing strategy, linking Pepsi to everything from the video release of the movie "E.T." to an America's Cup yacht.

And if you're not a big fan of the commercials that seem to precede every home video these days, you can blame Lorelli. He pioneered the concept, going to Paramount and suggesting that a Pepsi commercial might be the perfect way to launch the home video of the hit movie "Top Gun."

He knew that just any commercial wouldn't do, so he created an ad that mimicked the movie. A fighter pilot, unable to get to his Pepsi, which is strapped into the cockpit, rolls the jet upside down, pops the top and guzzles the soda.

Lorelli also headed Pepsi's Pizza Hut International unit (annual sales, \$1.8 billion),

where part of his job was to munch on pizza around the globe.

"I honestly believe I have eaten pizza in more countries in the world than anyone else," he said. His total: 44 countries. Under his guidance, Pizza Hut grew from restaurants in 68 countries to 92 countries.

And yes, he still loves pizza, which he calls "a universal food."

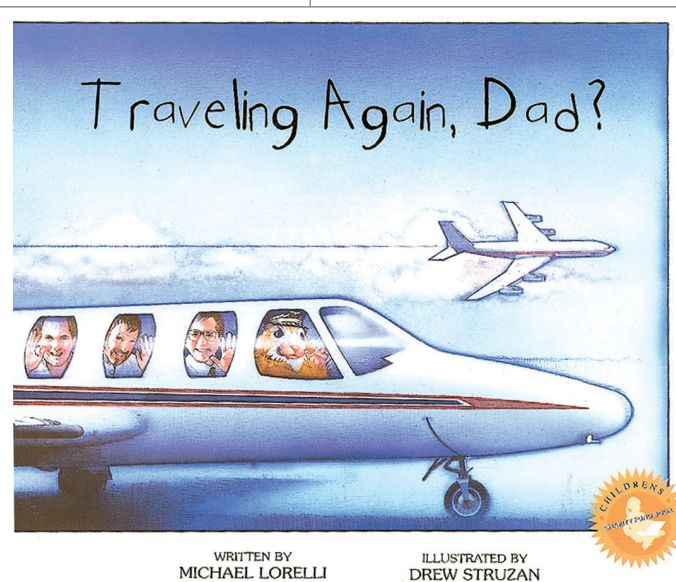
Those jobs kept Lorelli on the road for much of the year, a fact that he turned to his advantage by writing a children's book with the title, "Traveling Again, Dad?" Told from the perspective of Awesome, "the head hamster" in the house, the book explains how the family left at home can cope with separation and learn from it.

Lorelli and the book's illustrator, Drew Struzan, are donating proceeds to children's charities.

These days, Lorelli isn't traveling as much as he once was, which is fine with him. He has settled comfortably into his job at Latex International, whose sales have grown rapidly in recent years.

"I thrive on fueling growth," he said. "This company is so ripe to continue its growth. We can move fast. We have staff meetings at 7:30 a.m. and we can implement changes at 8 a.m."

With Latex International soaring, Mike Lorelli is enjoying a smooth flight these days.



In an illustration on the book cover, author and bedding industry CEO Mike Lorelli waves from the window just to the left of Awesome the Hamster. Illustrator Drew Struzan is left of Lorelli, and production coordinator John Taylor is on the far left.