

JEREMY REITMAN

(December 28, 2019)



Jeremy Reitman, a stalwart of the Canadian womenswear scene who guided Montreal-based Reitmans Ltd. through the so-called retail apocalypse, has died [on December 28, 2019]. The company announced the death of its chairman and CEO in a brief statement on Sunday, saying the entire company mourns for him. "The board of directors, management team and employees of the company extend their deepest sympathies to the Reitman family."

Reitman was also a loving father, stepfather and grandfather, according to an obituary published on the website of a Montreal funeral home. "A passionate golfer, skier, Moishes regular, toastmaster and philatelist, Jeremy was also a strong supporter of Israel and Jewish causes and a most devoted friend," reads the notice, which did not specify his age. "Jeremy will be sadly missed and fondly remembered by his many nieces, nephews, cousins and all who knew him."

The obituary says Reitman died peacefully in Florida on Saturday. It says he was an alumnus of Dartmouth College, McGill Law, Westmount High School and **Camp Kennebec**. He was also the grandson of Reitmans Ltd. founders Herman and Sarah Reitman. His brother, Stephen Reitman, serves as chief operating officer. Jeremy Reitman was head of the 93-year-old family business for a decade, serving as president before taking over as CEO and chairman. He steered the company through a rapidly changing retail landscape, contending with an influx of U.S. competitors who set their sights on the Canadian market and the rise of e-commerce. Amid the ruins of Canadian retailers, Reitmans is one of the few domestic chains still standing, though it is shrinking. When he took control, the company was growing, from 854 stores in 2004 to 968 in 2011. Today, there are 587. In 2011, the company announced that it would close its Cassis stores, which were geared towards women over 40. Three years later, it said it would also shutter Smart Set locations, which had targeted young urban professionals. Five separate banners remain, including Reitmans, Penningtons and Addition Elle, the latter two brands focused on the plus-size market.

With an eye to the rise of Lululemon and the "athleisure wear" trend, Reitman also led the company's foray into the activewear market with the launch of its Hyba line. There were briefly standalone Hyba stores, but now the clothes are sold online and in Reitmans locations. Under Jeremy Reitman's tenure, the company also gained attention for a series of notable ads in the mid-aughts that pitted Reitmans' wearable fashions against haute couture looks. "Reitmans: One. Haute Couture: Zero," one of the two judges would inevitably say, before explaining that the company's clothes are "designed for real life." In a December 2006 interview with *The Canadian Press*, Jeremy Reitman said the ads — and the middle-class ethos behind them — boosted sales for the company. "We've always built our business on the middle and the lower middle because that's where the money is, that's where the people are and that's where the broad base of customers are," he said at the time. Nearly a decade later, in 2015, the company tapped Meghan Markle as a spokeswoman. Before the now-Duchess of Sussex began dating Prince Harry, she designed a capsule collection for Reitmans, and in a series of ad spots, she proudly told viewers that "It's Reitmans. Really."

A company spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Reitman's death on Sunday. A funeral is scheduled for Jan. 2 in Montreal. The family will then sit shiva in his home.

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