

Gillie's Auto Lounge Owner Revving into Retirement

AUTO: Havas Formula Founder Launches
Auto Storage Club

■ By: MADISON GEERING

SAN DIEGO — **Michael Olguin** spent his career telling others' stories. In retirement, he's telling his own.

Before he was the founder of global public relations firm **Havas Formula**, Olguin was one of eight kids growing up in a small Southern California desert town.

With little means and four boys to entertain, Olguin's father — a diesel truck driver and car enthusiast — would take the kids wandering through car lots after hours.

"That love of cars started from when we were young," Olguin reflected, noting that he and his brothers would all go on to be car collectors.

Three decades after founding Havas Formula in 1992, Olguin officially retired from the company in 2023. After retiring, he spent time traveling and picking up new hobbies but soon grew restless.

"Once you retire after being a CEO in a very fast-growing, fast-moving industry, you wonder, 'What's next?'" Olguin said.

In 2025, Olguin visited the Minnesota facility where one of his cars was stored. A conversation with the auto storage owner inspired him to launch his own endeavor in San Diego.

Gillie's Auto Lounge, named after Olguin's father, opened this April, bringing to market a private automotive membership club offering secure vehicle storage, white-glove care and community.

The lounge is situated at 3341 Hancock St. Last April, Olguin purchased 17,000 square feet of property which included his 5,000 square foot lounge, a neighboring tenant's 7,000 square foot space and a 5,000 square foot parking lot across the street.





Gillie's Auto Lounge

➔ from page 7

About \$400,000 was invested in the buildout of Gillie's over a 10-month period.

To become a member at Gillie's, individuals must store a car there.

"We wanted it to feel like this really cool speakeasy," Olguin said. "Where a member could come in, hang out, have a beer, have a bourbon, smoke a cigar, enjoy themselves and hang out with other car guys or girls."

Project Steeped in Family History

Gillie's has received over 30 inquiries about membership thus far. About half a dozen members have been accepted.

The auto lounge's capacity is 30 cars. Beyond storage, Gillie's offers a full members' lounge with a bar, large-screen TVs, an outdoor cigar lounge, liquor lockers and more.

Designing the space was all about details, Olguin said. Plush leather couches, wooden paneling and warm

Upon closer inspection, the lounge is rife with loving references to family history: an entryway plaque dedicating the space to Olguin's father; vintage bourbon bottles collected by Olguin's sister; the Diecast car collection of Olguin's late brother, **Gary Olguin**, who died in 2020.

"The number one thing that my experience brings is the understanding of how to build a story," Olguin said. "We have put a lot of brain trust behind the idea of Gillie's, because Gillie was, yes, my dad, but he meant so much to everybody in our community that we grew up with."

Going the Extra Mile

Gillie's addresses a gap in San Diego's market, Olguin said. As it stands, most auto storage options in the region are geared towards "snowbirds," or people who spend their winters living in San Diego.

"Our customer is somebody who has either a classic car or an exotic car, like a **Ferrari** or a **Lamborghini**,"

Olguin said. "It's the type of customer who has an appreciation for the art piece that automobiles are. If you really love cars, this is a place you want to be."

Olguin has one other employee at Gillie's — Operations Manager **Riley Gekas**. Olguin hired Gekas, an auto content creator, for his extensive knowledge. The pair considers Gillie's first location to be a good test run.

"This is our beta," Olguin said. "It's designed so we could learn how to do this business — the right, the wrong, the pricing, the service, the details, the management of vehicles — all of those things. I've never done this before. All I've done is public relations."

Eventually, Olguin wants to scale the concept. When Gillie's is at 75% capacity, they will start looking at leasing space in Palm Springs and Orange County, then moving towards Los Angeles and Scottsdale.

Gillie's is already working on collaborations and partnerships with local and car clubs to get involved with the local scene.

The lounge will also be available as an event space.

As Olguin focuses on growing Gillie's brand, the story at its heart is what drives him.

He recalled the moment when two of his brothers saw the finished lounge for the first time in person.

"They both walked in and were like, 'Wow,' even though they saw the process along the way," Olguin said. "And then for my oldest brother, Gary, to not be here — but he's still here, you know? For us, it's a really cool story."

GILLIE'S AUTO LOUNGE

FOUNDED: 2026
CEO: MICHAEL OLGUIN
HEADQUARTERS: SAN DIEGO
BUSINESS: AUTO STORAGE AND MEMBERSHIP CLUB
EMPLOYEES: 2
WEBSITE: WWW.GILLIESAUTOLOUNGE.COM
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NOTABLE: GILLIE'S AUTO LOUNGE IS NAMED AFTER MICHAEL'S FATHER, WHO INSTILLED HIS LOVE OF CARS IN HIS CHILDREN FROM A YOUNG AGE.