

minnesota BUSINESS

INSPIRATION FOR GROWING COMPANIES

JUNE 2013 | VOLUME 23 | ISSUE 06

MONEY
MATTERS

SMARTER WAYS
TO MANAGE
YOUR PERSONAL
WEALTH

{ PAGE 16 }

Tourism
B·I·Z

PAGE

50

THE

100

BEST COMPANIES
TO WORK FOR
ISSUE

WHO THEY ARE — WHAT THEY CAN TEACH YOU

Renew
A BRAND

PAGE

12

BIG
THRILL

START A VENTURE,
KEEP YOUR
CORPORATE GIG 24

BALANCING
ACT: GIVE YOUR
PEOPLE WHAT
THEY WANT 20

Hit a Homer

SET UP SHOP AT TARGET FIELD WITH THE MINNESOTA TWINS 28

\$3.99US



0 70989 82597 0

THE NETWORKER

Fun zone

Why Barry Zelickson's corporate job didn't stop him from taking an entrepreneurial thrill ride

BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER

Few high-ranking corporate executives would, as an entrepreneurial adventure, launch an amusement park. But then, few have a story and background like Barry Zelickson's.

In March, Zelickson launched Big Thrill Factory, an indoor-outdoor family entertainment center in Minnetonka. Since 2001, he's also been with Border Foods Companies, a leading franchisee of fast-food restaurants with more than 4,000 employees. He's currently the senior vice president at Border Foods overseeing the HR, finance, marketing, and administration departments.

To understand how this unusual situation came to pass, it helps to know about Zelickson's family and his previous entrepreneurial escapades.

Zelickson was born into a family of entrepreneurs who are an integral part of the Twin Cities community, both from a business and philanthropic perspective. His father, Al, and brother, Brian, are among the most respected dermatologists in the nation and not only run their own practice, but are also involved in many entrepreneurial ventures and civic activities.

Sue Zelickson, his mother, is a James Beard Award-winning food journalist and the founder of Women Who Really Cook, a networking organization for women in the food business. She's a bundle of incredible energy who has single-handedly done more for charitable causes in this region than most people will do in a lifetime.

Having been surrounded early on by the entrepreneurial spirit, Zelickson was not unlikely to start a venture or two of his own. In 1995, he launched Spooky World, a seasonal Halloween-themed park that originally opened at Murphy's Landing in Shakopee. After three years, the popular Spooky World expanded and moved to nearby Canterbury Park.



Exciting times:
Barry Zelickson and
Michelle Lynch at
Big Thrill Factory

It enjoyed continued popularity, but when 9/11 hit, Zelickson opted out. "That tragic event changed the fabric of our nation, and I decided it was time to move on," he says. "We had a great seven-year run."

During that run, he worked with Jeff and Lee Engler, the founders of park sponsor Border Foods Companies, a locally owned franchisee of Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, WingStreet,

Au Bon Pain, and Sonic Drive-In restaurants. The company owns more than 180 locations throughout Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, South Dakota, and Wyoming, with the majority of the restaurants based in Minnesota.

"When they offered me an executive role at the company, it was an opportunity that I couldn't pass up," says Zelickson. "The chance to work side by side with them on a

THE NETWORKER

daily basis was one of the best business decisions I have made in my career ... The Englers have been my mentors over the years."

A thrilling development

I wondered how Zelickson juggles the dual roles of his corporate life at Border Foods and his startup venture at Big Thrill Factory. "Lee and Jeff Engler were incredibly supportive of my plans," he says. "We worked out an arrangement where I could continue to serve as an executive at Border Foods Companies while creating Big Thrill Factory at the same time."

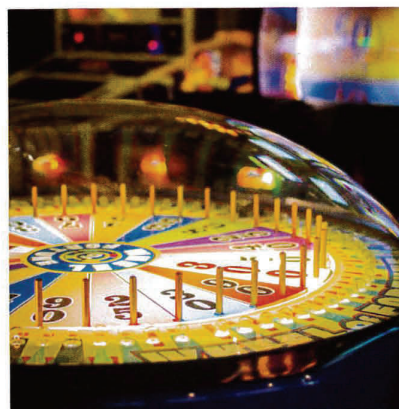
The concept for the entertainment center started out as a much smaller venue, he says: "Originally I envisioned opening an indoor-outdoor mini-golf course, and the idea took off from there."

Then he was approached by a business associate, Michelle Lynch, who had an idea for a similar concept but was initially unaware of his plans to create Big Thrill Factory. "We teamed up, traveled around the country doing research on entertainment facilities, and put together the business plan for Big Thrill Factory," Zelickson says.

Over the past three years, Zelickson and Lynch raised money, identified a location, and worked with consultants to bring Big Thrill Factory from an idea to a reality. "When looking for financing, we initially approached family and friends, who were key in making it possible for us to move our idea forward," Zelickson says. "We also got an SBA loan through Alerus Financial, and together they were instrumental in helping us put together a solid game plan."

Next came the hardest part: finding the perfect location. The park required 40,000 square feet inside, with an additional 15,000 square feet outside. Working with a real estate broker, Zelickson and Lynch identified potential sites and eventually decided to locate in Minnetonka, at the intersection of Highway 7 and County Road 101, where a Kmart used to be.

"The city of Minnetonka was tremendous to work with, and we have no doubt



Games galore: Zelickson made sure Big Thrill Factory had no shortage of entertainment options

that we made the right decision in choosing this location," says Zelickson.

Down to the last detail

Today, Big Thrill Factory is an indoor-outdoor family entertainment center featuring games and attractions including bowling, laser tag, a three-story fun factory, a black-light ropes course, and bump-and-spin cars, plus a seasonal outdoor facility with trampolines, 18-hole mini-golf, and a giant slide.

Praise for the park has come from both guests and industry veterans. Among the latter is Norm Pink, whose two-plus decades in the business involved coin-operated games and the Circus Pizza chain.

"I'm extremely impressed by Big Thrill Factory," Pink says.

He notes that Zelickson and his team have incorporated the industry's latest technology. For instance, all the games operate on a card system in which prize points are controlled on the same cards, which is not only convenient for guests but also allows for better business management. "This makes the accounting and tracking far superior to anything we had 15 years ago," Pink says.

The games are the "latest and greatest," he says. "They aren't the traditional video games that people are tired of." And the prize counter is full of attractive merchandise that's fairly priced, he adds.

Zelickson and his team clearly devoted much thought to every aspect, from the menu to the many uses of the entertainment complex, which includes corporate meetings and events. "We did not want to limit Big Thrill Factory to being viewed as one-dimensional or as only an entertainment facility," he says. "We knew that the corporate market would be an important part of the mix, in addition to families. We built in meeting spaces and special activities so that

BIZ BRIEFING

BIG THRILL FACTORY, LLC

Headquarters:
Minnetonka

Leadership:
Barry Zelickson, partner and founder;
Michelle Lynch, partner and assistant
general manager; Darrel Blomberg,
general manager

Employees:
120

Revenue:
\$3 to \$4 million (expected, 2013)

Description:
Family entertainment center

Web:
bigthrillfactory.com



we could accommodate corporate meetings and host team-building events."

Zelickson and his team hired Pat Weber, a local chef and teacher at the Minneapolis Culinary Institute, to consult on the menu. In his mother, they also had the advice and expertise of a renowned foodie. Among the menu choices are specialty pizzas (with cheese blends and spices created expressly for Big Thrill Factory) and a 4-pound, 28-inch signature pizza. Wine and beer are also available, as is full catering.

Humbled and grateful

Zelickson credits his family, friends, and mentors with helping him achieve the success he's enjoyed so far. "My wife, Lisa, and my children, Zachary and Nicole, have been my rock and my inspiration," he says. "Lisa and I have been married 22 years, and I wouldn't be who I am today without her. Lisa and the kids are part of the team: they support me, they give me feedback, they pick me up when I am down, and I am the luckiest guy in the world.

"I also owe my success to my parents, family, and friends, who have been there every step of the way," he adds.

He's quick to credit his business associates, as well. "Lee and Jeff Engler have been my mentors and have given me opportunities that I would not have had otherwise," he says. "My business partner, Michelle, and the team at Big Thrill Factory give their all each and every day to making it a success.

"I am humbled and grateful for the people around me."

Does he have any insight and advice to share with entrepreneurs? "Follow your dreams. Stay focused. Big things happen when put your heart and soul into it — and you will be amazed at the results." 



STEVEN SCHUSSLER is CEO of Schussler Creative, the founder of Rainforest Café, and the author of *It's a Jungle in There: Inspiring Lessons, Hard-Won Insights, and Other Acts of Entrepreneurial Daring*.



NORTHFIELD LINES, INC.

We're The DRIVE Behind Worry-Free Travel!



Our group arrives together, safely and on time.

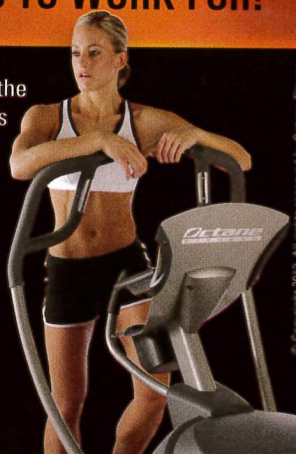
888-748-9634
WWW.NORTHFIELDLINES.COM



#1 ELLIPTICAL EXERCISER! | TOP 100 BEST COMPANIES TO WORK FOR!

Coincidental? We don't think so. We believe that building the best line of consumer and commercial elliptical exercisers happens when you bring together a great team of people who work for a great company with one important goal:

Inspire healthier lives with the most effective low impact fitness experience in the world.



OCTANEFITNESS.COM • 888-OCTANE4



© Copyright 2013. All rights reserved by Octane Fitness.

