

Joe Zimmer Shares His Thoughts on Success in Business

by Gerald Scott

Ask restaurateur Joe Zimmer how his Culver's restaurant in Lake Orion became the eatery of choice for car cruisers these days and he humbly says, "Oh, just a lot of hard work."

Of course there's more to the restaurant, and way more to Zimmer, than just that.

We sat down with Zimmer for a one-hour interview recently and there is more going on with his business model and workplace philosophies than the requisite hard work.

But, indeed, the Culver's restaurant run by Zimmer on Lapeer Road at the Auburn Hills-Lake Orion border sure has become the cruiser eatery of choice for not just Oakland County residents, but people from all over metro Detroit.

Zimmer has a well-thought-out business model and he shared a few secrets to his success the other day.

"We're very famous for our burgers, I like classic burgers, so I figured that 'classic burgers/classic cars is a good combination,'" Zimmer said.

"I was looking for a niche, and that seemed to be the niche. People like to have fun. I got a good DeeJay.

"So I just started promoting it. We try to make it a fun event. The word just kept traveling and traveling and it's just word of mouth."

He's still being humble because his Tuesday afternoon cruises have drawn hundreds of cars each visit. In other words, rival restaurants would kill to have Zimmer's patronage and turnover of visitors.

In fact, he estimates that his restaurant serves – get this – 10,000 visitors a week. That, of course, is more than 520,000 per year. Like we said, rivals would love to have those numbers.

But all those visitors, led by the cruisers, didn't just show up out of the blue. Zimmer and his restaurant staff more than made them all feel at home and he said that return visitors, regular visitors are a big part of his success.

"I've been a strong believer that if people come in and have a good time – they'll tell others. It just kind of snowballed from there," Zimmer said.

"And people like to win things. I came up with the idea of giving them a 'cruiser card,' they not only get a 15 percent discount on Tuesdays, they get it anytime with (the card). Our prices are already a great value, but this makes it an even greater value.

"I also got one of the best DJs in the area, DJ Phil, he knows a lot of cruisers and he helped spread the word.

"So, it's grown to be the largest cruise, on Tuesday nights, in Oakland County, if not (for a weekday) all summer.

"We have approximately 2,500 people that have those cruiser

cards. We've been doing it for four years. And we do fun things for them – once a month I'll bring in a band or live entertainment."

They also hold 50-50 raffles among the customers in the store and the raffle money benefits local charities and groups.

"The 50-50 goes back to the community – we choose a charity. This year, we chose the Lake Orion Cheerleaders, next year it's going to be the Lake Orion Dance Club, they come out and help support the fun," he said.

"We do special things, a couple weeks ago we had a 'Cruiser Appreciation Day' where we put on a buffet and gave them a great meal – all they could eat for \$6 and live entertainment."

This year, he expanded his offerings to get even more cruisers involved, his first so-called "Poker Run," which is a competitive road rally amongst cruisers.

"It's pretty famous for bikers, but I didn't know any cruisers who did it," he said. "I kind of coordinated that, I got nine other local businesses to join in with me, and we gave \$1,000 in prizes away to the people with the best poker hand.

"And they had fun. Again, I like to use that word, fun, because that's what it's all about.

"I don't like to do one-time events, I like to keep the momentum going. Just like we'll have a cruise tonight, then at least one more next Tuesday (Oct. 9) if the weather is above 60 degrees and



Joe Zimmer of Culver's. Portrait by Bill Springer

no rain. Hate to use that word, rain."

Here's where Zimmer's restaurant differs from other eateries that cater to the cruiser crowd. He's found a way to attract the cruiser crowd even during the winter months, bad weather, dead months – for everybody else, it's a dropoff in business, but not for Joe Zimmer.

"So, every Tuesday, even during the winter, they don't have to bring their classic car, but they gather here, we do Bingo, have prizes, have fun and have a great

meal. We're the only one that does that, as far as I know. But somebody else will probably pick up on the idea. Camaraderie is a good word, it's like a gathering or a club meeting, like Lions Club, Optimist Club . . . we have the Tuesday Night Culver's Cruiser Club, it's often the same people, 30 or 40 of them. But we give them a reason to come back."

Zimmer is also keen on hiring a friendly, energetic wait staff, people who smile and have customer service as their top priority. All of the above adds up to success.

AH Eye Care Will Donate Proceeds To Breast Cancer

AUBURN HILLS – Auburn Hills Eye Care, a provider of eyeglasses and sunglasses, is encouraging the public to "think pink" during the month of October.

In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a portion of the proceeds from all "pink" frames sold will go to support the Breast Cancer Society.

The event will take place at the Auburn Hills Eye Care location at 4151 Baldwin Ave., in Auburn Hills. The event began Oct. 1 and will run through Wednesday, Oct. 31, through the close of business on the last day of the month.

Eye Care's Special Events Coordinator, Karin Butcher, said that the office features a wide variety of designer frames and price points from Versace and Prada to DKNY, Ray-Ban and Vogue.

Auburn Hills Eye Care has a location that is easily accessible in the Shops at the Crossing Plaza, directly across from Great Lakes Crossing Mall. The shop typically accepts most insurance providers including VSP and Medicare.

Meanwhile, the Breast Cancer Society offers those living with the disease several different types of support. Education and awareness helps families understand how cancer develops, how they can spot symptoms early, and how they can make changes in their lives that will reduce their chances of developing breast cancer.

These educational efforts may reduce the chances of recurrence, and help other members of the family understand what precautions they can take to help reduce their risks of developing breast cancer.



Kevin Bell

Bell's Efforts Appreciated

AUBURN HILLS – Kevin L. Bell, senior manager – Diversity Supplier Development, Chrysler Group LLC, was named the 2012 "National Advocate of the Year" by the Michigan Minority Supplier Development Council (MMSDC) for his leadership in promoting the growth of minority supplier spending and business development at the automaker.

The MMSDC is a privately funded, nonprofit, corporate services organization comprising major corporations and public organizations representing education, industry, finance, professional services, construction, consumer products and health care.

The MMSDC also certifies that an individual business is minority-owned, -operated and -controlled. Chrysler Group is a corporate member of the MMSDC.

The award was presented to Bell during MMSDC's 29th Annual Awards Show held at the Detroit Institute of Arts Oct. 2. This was the second straight year Bell has earned this recognition.

Library to Present Intriguing WWII Program

The Auburn Hills Public Library will feature historian Larry Martin and his interview program that honors and records the life stories of World War II veterans.

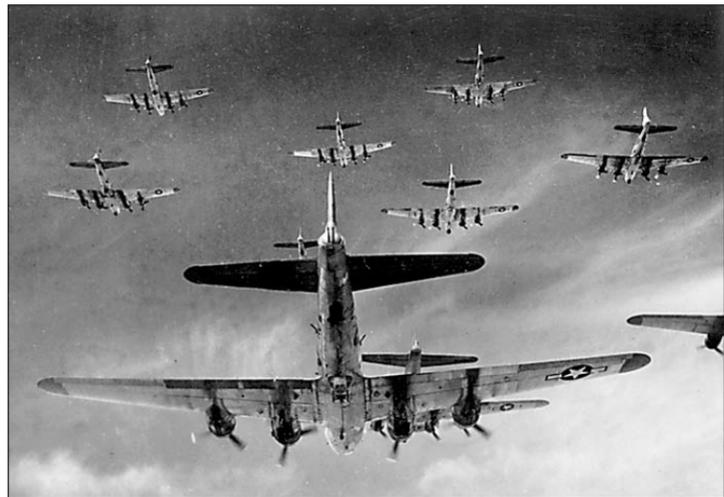
Entitled, "Larry Martin's World War II: In Their Own Words," the program is scheduled for Monday, Oct. 15, 6:30-8:30 p.m. This presentation will feature a taped interview with Lt. Francis Angier, U.S. 8th Air Force (Army Air Corps).

Lt. Angier will talk about his 33 combat missions as a B-17 pilot in the 457th Bomb Group, which flew missions from England over mainland Europe. He also flew ground support missions for the landings at Normandy, D-Day, June 6, 1944.

Martin has a unique background as a war historian.

"I became interested in World War II history when I was a kid," Martin said. "I have read about the war all of my life because it really interested me.

"Later, when I started to understand what our lives could have been like if the men of the 'Great-



Voices from World War II will be played at an AH Library program.

est Generation' had lost World War II, it made me want to tell as many people as I could about what our lives might have been like if it were not for their great sacrifices.

"I thought that a good place to start would be with my two daughters who were born in the

1960s. In 2000, I started to conduct interviews with those surviving front-line combatants."

And the rest, as they say, is war history. There will be tables of war memorabilia for the visiting public to review.

To register ahead of time, call the library at 248-364-6706.

Hampton Renovation is for Changeover to Quality Inn

AUBURN HILLS – Full House Properties, Inc., the long-term owner/operator of the Hampton Inn, located at 1461 North Opdyke Road, has announced that their property is undergoing extensive renovations and will be converting to a Quality Inn hotel at the end of this year.

Hotel officials say that more than three-quarters-of-a-million dollars (\$750,000) will be spent on renovations preparing for the conversion, primarily concentrating on improving the overall guestroom experience.

The hotel will remain open during this period, continuing to serve their guests, operating under the legacy Hampton Inn

name until the scheduled conversion.

During the 20-year Hampton Inn franchise licensing term, the hotel has been a top performer in the brand, Full House said, in product and guest services.

A great deal of the credit for maintaining such a record is attributed to Tom Keller, general manager at the hotel for the past 21 years, and his insistence on delivering an exceptional level of service to each and every guest, every time, officials say.

Keller and his entire staff will be staying on through the name change, with the same dedication to making each guest's experience as enjoyable as possible,

Full House hotel officials claim.

The current hotel amenities will also be maintained during and following the brand conversion, including a complimentary hot breakfast, 24-hour coffee and tea service, free high-speed wireless Internet access, 24-hour fitness center, flat panel TVs with HDTV programming in all guestrooms and an outdoor heated pool, as well as three meeting rooms that can accommodate groups of up to 100 attendees.

All 124 guestrooms will undergo extensive upgrades and renovations. The public areas and meeting rooms will receive upgraded features to reflect the new identity as well.