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This local indoor adventure park is coming to Sterling, looking to franchise

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Rockville indoor entertainment venue ZavaZone is preparing to take the East Coast by storm, with a second location set to open and a call for franchisees.

ZavaZone, an adventure park that combines indoor climbing, trampolines and obstacle courses a la “American Ninja Warrior,” plans to open a 34,000-square-foot location in Sterling on Oct. 28 with a grand opening planned for Nov. 4. The facility is larger than the Rockville original, and will include two rope walls and an obstacle made popular by the aforementioned show.

Simultaneously, founders Josh Oboler and Joe Henry have been drawing up franchise documents, with plans to sign agreements with franchisees as far north as New York and as far south as Atlanta. Initial investment for the franchise is between \$1.6 million and \$2.8 million, according to a franchise website.

But that investment comes with a big payoff: In the first nine months of operation from when it opened in April 2016, ZavaZone in Rockville averaged \$247,000 a month in sales, with approximately 7,500 guests per month.

Oboler and Henry tapped into the growing indoor entertainment market at the right time, as the popularity of the concepts among families continues to grow and big-box retail space vacated by failing national chains, especially in the suburbs, is widely available. The goal is to have 75 locations in five years and between 150 and 200 in 10 years.

“With the reorganization in the retail world, we’re at a good place,” said Henry. “We’re getting cold calls from malls all over the place. They have the big boxes, with the ceiling height, sometimes a mezzanine, and we draw in a lot of participants and nonparticipants.”

Like some of its competitors, ZavaZone plays to the purchaser — namely, the parent — by focusing on creating an environment that’s enjoyable to the parents as well as the kids. That’s where Henry and Oboler got the idea, actually — they already ran a chain of preschools called Metro Montessori, and when they



JOANNE S. LAWTON

ZavaZone founders Josh Oboler, left, and Joe Henry are getting ready to take their adventure park concept up and down the East Coast.

started taking their own kids to the kinds of indoor play spaces that were available, they found them lacking.

The activities at ZavaZone are such that adults can join in as well, but if they don't want to the facility has a "parent zone" with coffee and tea, comfortable seating, Wi-Fi, TVs and healthy snacks. And the company tries to stay ahead of its competition by having most of the facility be modular, which means the company can move equipment and attractions around or out to make room for the newest trends in indoor adventure.

"We decided at the beginning that while 12-year-old boys are a large demographic that enjoy what we do, they're not our customers," said Oboler. "Their families are our customers. You have to look at who's actually paying."

They are even considering putting in a more full-service food operation — right now they mostly get food for events catered and offer grab-and-go snacks — that serves booze to parents. While a bar isn't in the works for Sterling, it could be in location No. 3, Henry said.

"I think this industry is one that is going to be expanding significantly over the next few years," he added.

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