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More than the Nelsons: Kalahari Resorts Employees are a Family Extension

Resort Recently Named #1 Coolest Indoor Waterpark in the World by Conde Nast Traveler

Pocono Mountains, Penn. (March 31, 2014) – At Kalahari Resorts, every detail of the guest experience is a labor of love – literally. And, as with many instances in life, things aren't always what they seem. Recently, Todd Nelson, owner of Kalahari Resorts, received a letter detailing a recent guest's experience in which the author was shocked to find out the man working a busy breakfast crowd with "a face covered in sweat, clearing tables and running around like a chicken with his head cut off trying to get out of the weeds," was in fact, the owner himself.

"One would assume that the owner of the Kalahari would be in a three-piece suit and in an air-conditioned office somewhere, instead, you [Todd Nelson], showed ... you have a fire-driven passion for your company," said the letter.

While self-made success stories are a dime-a-dozen today, there's something special about the family-focus of Todd Nelson that bleeds into the team member dynamic. Nelson grew up on a farm in the Wisconsin Dells and began working a plethora of jobs at the age of 15 – from an auctioneer, to a railroad company, to driving a beer truck, nothing was out of the question to help support his family.

A year out of high school, he married his wife, Shari, and purchased a bar with his brother-in-law at the age of 20. Two years later, he bought the building across the parking lot – turning it into Pizza Pub – a still- popular Wisconsin Dells restaurant. As the Wisconsin Dells began to develop into today's "Waterpark Capital of the World," Nelson built the first Kalahari Resort in 2000 and the rest is history.

What's most notable about the resort is the family-dynamic. The Nelsons, who will be celebrating their 34th anniversary this year, helm Kalahari's expanding empire with the help of their five children – Todd Jr., Travis, Natasha, and twin daughters Alissa and Ashley.

"Kalahari is a result of hard work and love and represents my family's dream come to life," says Nelson, "We aren't content sitting on the sidelines. How are you supposed to lead if not by example? We're a hands on family and are willing to jump in and help out our team members at any time."

As the open date for Kalahari's newest property, located in the Poconos, inches closer (currently on target for a summer 2015 grand opening), employment is top-of-mind for both Kalahari and local residents alike. The project, which is estimated to bring approximately 1,000 jobs to the area, has the family-owned Kalahari Resorts focused not only on acquiring talent, but also on developing and promoting within the company. Something a lot of companies preach, but don't practice. This isn't the case with Kalahari Resorts, the two existing locations in Wisconsin Dells and Sandusky, Ohio, boast a whopping 60 percent of management team members that have been promoted from within.

“We want to provide a “beyond expectations” experience for our guests, but we also want to provide the same experience to our team members,” says Nelson, “we are dedicated to providing opportunities for growth, development and progression of our staff’s hospitality careers.”

The Poconos resort marks Kalahari’s first foray into the East Coast. As with the existing properties, Kalahari plans to invest heavily in employee training, taking the time to place each employee through “Kalahari University” – an in-depth look at Kalahari’s origins, philosophy and vision, along with the customer approach to guest relations. To date, more than 90 percent of team members have successfully “graduated” from Kalahari University.

What are the types of things one will learn at Kalahari? Well, first of all, how to ROK It Out. Internal Kalahari documents outline the company’s plan to deliver a “beyond expectations” experience. For example, they ask their team members display Random Acts of Kindness (ROK). And while the company offers suggestions for all areas of the resort (examples include sending guests with small children letters from Kalahari characters Kenya and Kya to simply bringing balloons or “bendy straws” to those dining in the restaurant), the real magic happens when team members find their own way to ROK It Out.

“We continue to grow, continue to expand and we rely heavily on the 2,500+ team members across three states to deliver an unparalleled experience to every guest that walks through the door,” says Travis Nelson.

A recent example includes a boy who accidentally left his favorite stuffed animal, Pup-Pup, behind at Kalahari. After finding the animal, Kalahari decided to have a little fun with Pup-Pup. Pup-Pup was given the royal treatment, a massage at Spa Kalahari, a premiere spot lounging poolside and a trip on the Merry-Go-Round was just the beginning. After taking plenty of photos to share with the family, Pup-Pup was overnighted to the young guest with a box full of Kalahari goodies. Details of Pup-Pups adventures were shared on the internal company website and on social media.

“We are searching for team members who go the extra mile to have positive, memorable interactions with our guests,” says Nelson, “but we’re also looking for people who are excited to dig in and be a part of something great, those that aren’t afraid of rolling up their sleeves and connecting.”

Nelson’s unique mix of hard work paired with a dedicated team-focused culture is making waves – and not just in the close to home markets. Recently, *Conde Nast Traveler* named Kalahari’s Sandusky, Ohio location the [#1 Coolest Indoor Waterpark in the World](#), ranking it above top-notch competitors from Beijing, China to Krausnick, Germany to Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley.

“It’s an incredible honor to be recognized for the authentic, customer-focused experience we are able to create with our existing resorts in Wisconsin Dells and Sandusky, Ohio,” says Todd Nelson, “we are excited to bring our tried-and-true, beyond expectations experience to the Pocono region and share with guests what Kalahari is all about.”

Kalahari Resorts is currently working to build the leadership team for the Poconos location, and, as the open date draws closer, they’ll look to bring on additional team members for a variety of functions. For more information about Kalahari Resorts and Conventions please visit www.KalahariResorts.com/Pennsylvania.

About Kalahari Resorts

Kalahari Resorts in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., and Sandusky, Ohio, deliver a “world-away” waterpark resort and conference experience beyond expectations. The authentically African-themed Kalahari Resorts, privately owned by the Nelson family, are home to America’s largest indoor waterparks. All Kalahari Resorts feature

well-appointed guestrooms, full-service Spa Kalahari, a fully equipped fitness center, on-site restaurants, unique retail shops, and a state-of-the-art conference center. Kalahari Resorts and Convention Centers frequently receive awards and accolades for our guest and convention services. Recent recognition includes: Conde Nast Traveler's #1 Coolest Waterpark in the World, TripAdvisor's 2014 Travelers' Choice Awards, Silver Star recognition for Best Family-Friendly Meeting Hotel and Resort in Smart Meeting's 2014 Smart Stars Awards, January 2014 Diner's Choice recognition from OpenTable, the Daily Herald's 2013 Reader's Choice Awards for Best Indoor Waterpark, selection as one of the nation's Top Family Resorts by Family Fun magazine for 2013, being named the Best Conference Center in the state by the Wisconsin Hotel and Lodging Association, and selection as the Corporate Meeting Destination of the Year by Cleveland Business Connects magazine. For reservation and guest information, call 1-877-KALAHARI (525-2427) or visit: KalahariResorts.com. To learn more about Kalahari Resorts, members of the media are encouraged to visit KalahariMedia.com.

Accompanying visuals:

- Vintage Photos of Todd Nelson
- Nelson Family Photo
- Pup-Pup Photos

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