

Mini-Golf Perspectives



A view of a mini-golf course at a Chuckster's location. The company has four centers.

The Chuckster's Story

By Mark Blasko

I never intended to rent colored golf balls to people, but that is what I do for a living now, from four locations, and I couldn't be happier. Chuckster's began in 2007 as a miniature golf and ice cream place right down the road from my custom apparel business in Chichester, N.H. I thought it would be a fun side business, but when over a thousand people showed up the first day to play, I thought, "This is like a real business!" and within a year, I had sold my other business and went into the family entertainment industry full time.

I had always enjoyed playing miniature golf and believed that my home town of Concord, N.H., needed a course. It was a little harder than I thought to open the course because it became obvious that four things

were needed to pull it off:

- **Capital.** Banks didn't want to lend a high percentage towards a single-purpose, weather-dependent, seasonal business.
- **Experience.** One needed to know how to run a business, talk the language of contractors, lenders, vendors, legal, and accounting folks, and I found that having a track record of success even in unrelated industries helped the process.
- **Time.** Planning and building the miniature golf course and the rest of the facility was almost a full-time job and it would have been hard to pull off while working at a job full time. Fortunately my apparel business, Shirtmasters, provided the

Continued on page 64

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(From page 62)

capital, experience, and time to make Chuckster's appear.

- Persistence. Persistence is a polite way to say stubbornness, but it was definitely needed to overcome things like resistance from residential abutters at the planning board, wetland issues, financing challenges, etc. Many people with less persistence might have given up along the way.

After attending the Rookies and Newcomers workshop at IAAPA, I then sought out a miniature golf course builder to work with. Harris Miniature Golf worked collaboratively with me to design a challenging, interest-



For the owner of Chuckster's, observing many guests playing miniature golf over time helps in the planning of the next location.



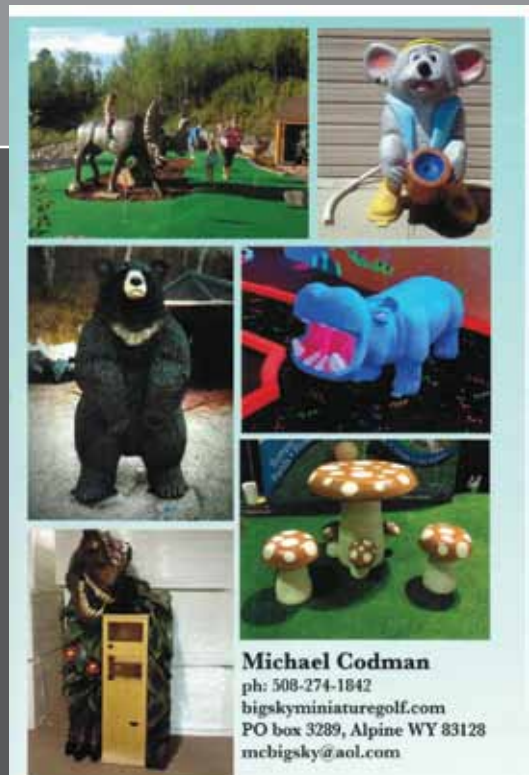
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ing, and beautiful course.

The original Chuckster's was an instant hit. Residents and visitors to New Hampshire loved the course and the environment we created. We added batting cages immediately, and have added attractions to this location almost yearly since. We now have 14 attractions including go-karts, a climbing wall, an aerial park, and many other activities, but golf remains the anchor and accounts for a high percentage of our revenue.

Since, I have opened three additional courses. What are the advantages of running four miniature golf courses?

- More flexible staffing; with three courses within an hour of each other, we sometimes shift staff from one park to another.
- Experimenting with new ideas at one park before adding to the others. For example, we would not have known that "Upchuck" ice cream flavor would be one of the most popular, but it is, so we offer it at all four places.
- Trying scheduling software, point of sale systems, employee policies and other operational tasks at

one park helps educate all the parks and the best practices are duplicated.

- Observing many guests playing over time helps me plan the next Chuckster's.
- The brand name has become well-known and sought after.

I know my place in the amusement industry and don't expect to get much national attention. But I bet if you know anyone from New Hampshire or northern Massachusetts that likes to have fun, they will probably perk up when you mention Chuckster's.

(For more information, contact Mark Blasko by calling 603-491-3192, emailing info@chucksters.com or visiting www.chucksters.com.)



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