

Racing to the Top of the Catering Business

Don Fraser – St. Catharine Standard

Joshua Hendin's road to business success was almost as bumpy as his beloved motor racing. And that drive has pushed him from a drifting early career to another as a top caterer – supplying culinary delights to the likes of Cirque du Soleil.

St. Catharines-born Hendin was raised by a hardworking single mom. As a student, he just scraped by at Queen Mary and St. Catharines Collegiate schools. His first taste in the working world was as a bartender at the former Lakeside bar in Port Dalhousie in the late 1990s.

"I was known to blow fireballs back in the day," the 38-year-old said with a laugh. "I worked the hut, that was my spot."

"I'm very sentimental about Port Dalhousie ... I lived in one of those little cottages by the carousel, and it was one of my first apartments."

That was followed by a stint studying philosophy at the University of Ottawa, and then a brief move to Europe. Eventually, he beat a path that led him to Victoria and Whistler, B.C. That led to work as a helicopter pilot, but that gig – combined with working as a bartender – failed to amount to much.

"I could see that the opportunities in the helicopter industry were far and few between," he said. "And the opportunities that did exist were not rewarding financially."

"So it was a real struggle... all signs were pointing to 'leave'".

The change began when he set his sights to working with a catering company – something he surprisingly enjoyed. He would soon found Treeline Catering – the title a nod to his previous mountain life. It has grown quickly to now service Cirque du Soleil, Facebook, Air Canada, WeDay among others, and has a seasonal staff of up to 65 persons.

The genesis for the business was a London, Ont. contract in 2008 for a charity-event dinner that featured a daunting 2,500 guests. At the time Treeline Catering had no staff, no kitchen and no equipment. He then blitzed college culinary schools to gather the 125 staff necessary to make the event happen.

He calls those beginnings as "hair losing, ulcer inducing." "But it went exceedingly well," said Hendin, who is Treeline's company director.

After a short lull, "the catering really took off," he said.

"One good job led to another good job." By 2012, it landed the first gig with the Cirque de Soleil.





Hendin said his Toronto-based company has now catered for several different tours across Canada. It also recently expanded into a third kitchen.

"Other things keep coming our way," he said. "Recently I served the Queen of Jordan and I've (catered) for Gorbachev and Al Gore."

"It's been a fun, fun ride."

With that in mind, he recently raced one of the largest motorsport events in the world - Mexico's Baja 1000. In November, his team hit the road in a dune buggy covered in Treeline Catering logos. Hendin reports coming first in his racing class. This, after he finished a motorcycle competition at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah. "I'm in disbelief I managed to win the Baja," he said.

"You're in the middle of nowhere, through desert, mountains. It's not just about speed, it requires ingenuity and determination.

"Cars break down and banditos try to derail you," Hendin said. "Locals build booby traps so they can watch you crash for their amusement.

"I'd just romanticized it as one of the coolest things a guy can do."

Hendin says he feels grateful for his journey to a better place.

"I came from a pretty meagre beginning," he said. "I was thrown around a little bit in life and wasn't sure where I'd end up.

"And then I stumbled on this catering opportunity, managed to sink my teeth into it, and turned it into something to be proud of.

"It's exciting, and also something others might appreciate, knowing that they can do it also."

Mom Mary Anne Goldsborough describes a son who was always keen to take risks. Goldsborough said she's proud of Hendin for channeling his energy, fearlessness and initiative to make his entrepreneurial life as successful as it is.

"He's had a nice disposition from Day 1," she adds. "A very decent person and a nice son," he said.