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Middletown native launches regional dining app

By Paige Jones



Brad Sayler with his wife, Amy, and their two daughters, Annalise and Violet.

Middletown native Brad Sayler never imagined his life would be what it is today.

Two years ago, Sayler, a Gaithersburg resident, worked at a law firm in Washington, building a successful career and taking home a comfortable salary to his wife and two young daughters.

Everything changed for Sayler in February 2014. He took the plunge from the corporate world to the startup field, pouring his passion and dreams into the smartphone app that would become [Spotluck](#).

“To leave a stable law-firm job to not making any money and essentially pour your savings into pursuing your dream is a big leap of faith,” he said.

But Sayler, with the support of his family, did it. He and business partner Cherian Thomas launched the app the same month, aiming to connect customers with locally owned restaurants near them, beginning with Rockville.

Spotluck soon expanded to other areas, including Sayler’s home area of Frederick, in early 2015.

Almost like a cellphone version of “Wheel of Fortune,” Spotluck lets users select a neighborhood, or hub, in Maryland, Virginia or Washington to dine, then spin a wheel of the participating restaurants.

Once the ticker lands on a specific restaurant, the user receives a discount, typically between 10 and 30 percent. The app offers smaller discounts to other eateries in the area, helping restaurants get people in the door during down times and offering a means for immediate feedback, Sayler said.

“The app is a community,” he said. “It’s a community of local restaurants with unique food ... unique atmosphere and unique people, but it’s also a community of people who like to eat local.”

Sayler said the Frederick community took to Spotluck immediately. Today, about a dozen downtown restaurants are involved with Spotluck, including Bushwaller’s, Sabor de Cuba and Vini Culture Wine Bar & Cafe.

Sayler graduated from Middletown High School in 2000. He ventured to the University of Delaware for college. He graduated with a degree in accounting, which Sayler said he viewed as a practical career path.

“I wasn’t exactly sure what I wanted to do, although I knew I wanted to basically have a skill coming out of college that would be useful in a variety of situations,” Sayler said. “So accounting seemed like a good thing to do.”

Jim Draper, of the accounting firm Draper & McGinley in downtown Frederick, said he noticed an “entrepreneurial streak” in Sayler at a young age. Sayler spent two summers interning with Draper, a family friend who would later become a mentor.

After college, Sayler went to work in public accounting as an auditor for several years. He changed courses to pursue law upon discovering its power and potential in his field.

“I realized that my clients would listen to me, which was great, but they would listen to their lawyers a lot closer,” he said. “I thought it’d be a good idea to go to law school and learn about corporate law.”

Sayler graduated from George Mason University School of Law in 2009. He got a law degree, specializing in business law. He worked for Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP, one of the larger law firms in Washington, for several years.

During this time, Cherian Thomas, the husband of one of his childhood friends, approached him about launching Spotluck. Thomas hoped to draw from Sayler’s business background, Sayler recalled.

Sayler agreed, and after months of work, the two were ready to launch Spotluck in 2014. Sayler quit his job at the law firm and immersed himself in the new business, a scary but exhilarating experience.

“It was interesting because it was the first time I was truly self-employed,” he said. “During college, I had tutoring gigs and things like that, but I never had my own business to water and fertilize and make sure it grows and blossoms.”

“It was a little scary, but it was also exciting knowing that based on whatever myself and Cherian did [that] we would succeed or fail,” he added. “To know our fate was solely in our hands was exciting.”

Today, Spotluck is active in more than 20 hubs in Maryland, Virginia and Washington, offering users discounts at more than 300 restaurants and providing advertising and exposure for local eateries. The company recently expanded to Leesburg, Virginia, and College Park, Maryland.

The company hopes to begin planting roots and look at launching hubs in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago.

This year also could be a big one for Sayler as he looks to return to his roots in Middletown to raise his two daughters with his wife, Amy.

“We have our work cut out for us, he said with a laugh. “We thought 2015 was a busy year, but I think 2016 is going to be pretty nuts.”

Source: http://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/economy_and_business/middletown-native-launches-regional-dining-app/article_caa4157f-ef9c-5548-bb71-782309718274.html