



## SPECIAL OPS VETREPRENEUR PROFILE

### FROM WARRIOR TO WINGMAN

Marine Corps officer Todd Waldemar didn't let his lack of business experience stop him from owning his own restaurant.

BY DAN FAZIO

When Todd Waldemar separated from the Marines in 2006, he wanted to become a business owner. There was just one problem. Waldemar was a combat engineer. He had no business training, no business experience and no MBA. What he did have were the considerable skills he learned during 12 years in the military, including a determination that nothing would stand in his way.

"I guess part of that is the whole military thing too, because in the military of course it's common to be put in situations where you don't know exactly how it's going to be done," Waldemar said. "And sometimes things seem impossible. But you're forced to take the resources which you're given and just get the mission accomplished. If you have to do a handstand, you do a handstand. If you have to do a cartwheel, you do a cartwheel. But whatever



#### FROM THE CEO

Wing Zone franchises have proven so popular around military bases that the company is now expanding to the bases themselves. Wing Zone signed an agreement with Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) in late 2009 to open 10 stores on bases over the next two years. The first store is scheduled to open in July at Fort Gordon in Augusta, Ga. Three more will follow late this year or early 2011. Locations include Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Carson, Colo.; and Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas. "It's exciting because this is truly the first buffalo wing concept to go onto military bases in its history," said Matt Friedman, CEO

and co-founder of Wing Zone.

Wing Zone, a chicken wing franchise that specializes in delivery and takeout, will develop three different models on military bases: the traditional food court model, a store that includes delivery service and a sit-down restaurant that will serve beer and wine. "We have had a lot of success putting Wing Zone locations off bases — traditional shopping centers or buildings off base," Friedman said. "And the clientele around a military base suits our brand and our opportunity very well. The military consumer enjoys quality food and is willing to pay a fair price for it."



#### THE FRANCHISEE

### Todd Waldemar

Age: 42  
Residence: Norfolk, Va.  
Franchise: Wing Zone  
Locations: 4

Military Service:  
U.S. Marine Corps (1989-1998)  
U.S. Marine Corps Reserve (2001-2006)  
Highest Rank Held:  
Major  
Military Occupation:  
Combat Engineer  
Education:  
Bachelor of Science in General Engineering,  
U.S. Naval Academy  
Family: Wife and 8 children

How'd you get that franchise?  
Waldemar searched for a franchise that would fill an empty niche in Jacksonville. Once he zeroed in on Wing Zone, he researched the concept on the Internet, crunched a lot of numbers and, most importantly, talked to franchisees.

"I was trying to gauge as best as possible what I could expect from the revenue and profitability and things like that," Waldemar said. "And I was trying to stack the deck as much as I could in my favor before I actually took the step."



Wing Zone  
www.wingzone.com

HQ: Atlanta  
# of Stores: 93 in 25 states, with 30 in development  
2010 Revenue: \$200M  
Franchises: 8  
2008 Revenue: \$46 million

#### START YOURS

FRANCHISE FEE: \$25,000  
LIQUID DISCOUNT: \$50,000 off the franchise fee  
VETERAN DISCOUNT: \$10,000 off the franchise fee  
REQUIRED:  
Minimum net worth of \$250,000 and \$100,000 liquidity.

## SPECIAL OPS

### BEST PIECE OF ADVICE

If you're interested in buying a franchise, talk to franchisees.

"You learn an awful lot by going to and talking to different franchisees. And every experience you have, even if you don't actually do it, is a wealth of information. Start doing that. Be bold and go out there. And try a few of them out."

Even in a down market, there are always opportunities. And those opportunities are waiting for people who are bold and who can go after it. So have a can-do attitude, believe that you can do it and don't let one setback or one failure deter you from getting your dream.

you have to do, you do what it takes in order to accomplish the mission."

That can-do attitude has served him well. Today Waldemar owns four Wing Zone restaurants — a chicken wing franchise concept — in North Carolina and Virginia.

#### FRANCHISE FITS

Waldemar began by opening a Wing Zone in Jacksonville, N.C., where he was last stationed with the Marines at nearby Camp Lejeune. Even before he separated, Waldemar began researching ways to realize his dream of being a business owner. "When it came to getting out, I knew I wanted to get into business and I was just trying to figure out a way I could get some experience and get my feet on the ground," he said. "And so that's one reason why I chose franchising. So I looked for a franchise model where I could learn some business skills and where they would teach me enough to be successful."

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#### "THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY..."

Waldemar used most of his savings to launch his franchise, a risk he acknowledges not everyone is willing to take. Still, he advises potential franchisees not to let a lack of capital stop them from owning a business, even in a tight credit market. Look for financing through family, mentors, veterans' programs, banks, franchisors or investors. "There's always a way to finance anything," he said. "Most of all, cash in on that never-quit attitude you learned in military to realize your dream of owning a business."

"Even in a down market, there are always opportunities," Waldemar said. "And those opportunities are waiting for people who are bold and who can go after it. So have a can-do attitude, believe that you can do it and don't let one setback or one failure deter you from getting your dream."



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#### JUST FOR FUN

Favorite part: team  
The winner

What's in your fridge?  
Everything and a lot of it in our 3 refrigerators

What CD is playing in your car right now?  
"Acceleration in the Glory of God"

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