

Brian Hall

Winter Garden, Florida



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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Brian Hall:

For Brian Hall, retired Air Force pilot and serial entrepreneur, identifying and pursuing new business opportunities is a way of life. After graduating from Valdosta State University, Hall spent three years with the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, also known by its nickname, Hurricane Hunters, and another eight years flying C-130s, before launching his first, and certainly not his last, entrepreneurial endeavor. From a payroll business to pizza, floating docks, solar farms and more, Hall's journey is filled with highs and lows, accomplishments, lessons learned and exemplifies the curiosity and bravery required to earn the title of serial entrepreneur.

"My wife says it's a sickness," Hall said with a laugh, referring to his

propensity to identify and act on opportunities wherever he goes. “I can’t help it. I see ideas for businesses everywhere I go.”

While still in the Air Force Reserves, Hall started his first company – a payroll company called Express Payroll based in Mobile, AL. His father did payroll for a local church and another small business and Hall saw, “how easy it was”. Despite still flying full-time and, on several occasions, having to bring his printer and computer on missions to do payroll from his hotel room, Hall grew Payroll Express at an impressive clip.

“At that time, ADP had the largest market share of payroll business and they weren’t servicing their customers very well,” Hall said. “If I found out they were with ADP, it was easy to take them. After four years, I sold the company to ADP in 1998 and then started an employee leasing company. We initially had a non-compete with ADP, but once that expired, the company took off. From ’98 to ’01, we acquired 3,000 cross-walk guards with Orange County, CA, along with all the Rotor Rooter employees throughout the Pacific Northwest and Hawaii. With nearly 12,000 ‘outside’ employees, an internal staff of 30 and \$120 million in annual sales, we became the largest employer in Mobile, AL.”

One of the large groups Hall’s business acquired was the Alabama Board of Realtors. They put together a self-funded insurance plan to cover the Realtors – many of whom, because of their age and underlying medical conditions, were unable to find health insurance on their own. Unfortunately, what seemed like a great idea turned into a catastrophe. Long story short, the loss fund was insufficient to pay the health claims and the company was losing \$350,000 per month. Attorneys got involved and Hall sold the company in bankruptcy. Undeterred from the

experience, Hall was determined to press on with a new opportunity.

“My father and I put together a company called Bulldog Marine, followed by Bulldog Marine Construction,” Hall said. “Within four years, we had over 300 employees and \$11 Million in sales. We were able to run the company out of my dad’s house. By 2013, however, worker’s comp rates came way down and clients didn’t have to go through us. It was time to focus on something else.”

Two years prior, Hall launched an immigration company that specialized in recruiting executives from India, China and Vietnam interested in purchasing a Marco’s Pizza franchise in the United States as a way to obtain legal immigration status. The arrangement would give the immigrant the title of President of the business entity and would result in Hall maintaining ownership after a payback period. From that opportunity came another in the restaurant business when Hall and his wife opened BabyBell Pizza – named after their granddaughter, Isabelle, who was listed as CEO at 17 months of age. They closed the restaurant last year, along with their Marco’s Pizza locations, to focus on the new dock business.

“When our oldest daughter left for college, we moved to Florida,” Hall said. “We always wanted to live ‘somewhere south of Orlando’, but we ended up in Winter Garden and we love it. In 2016, we purchased a dock company in Orlando and changed the name to KonaDocks. I knew the business well from our work and time spent on Bulldog Marine Construction, but I also had some different ideas I wanted to pursue.”

Hall continued, “When Hurricane Matthew went through Florida in September of that year, a lot of the existing docks were destroyed and

under water. Permits were hard to get and we couldn't get out to do the work – that's really when the idea of doing floating docks came about.”

To successfully circumvent the long delays caused by the need to get permits before beginning construction, Hall made a brilliant move. He completed licensing through the United States Coast Guard to position KonaDocks as a certified boat builder. From that point on, if someone wanted a dock, they would simply register the dock as a vessel through the Department of Motor Vehicles, thus eliminating the need for a permit and allowing the jobs to be completed much quicker.

“Not only are we able to eliminate the permit process, we're also able to offer a superior product that's 20% less than the cost of a traditional dock,” Hall said. “We also offer a 20 year warranty – no one else in this business does that.”

Despite having a solid business model, acquiring customers in places like Panama, Costa Rica, New York and Texas, and appearing on A&E's hit show, *Zombie House Flippers*, there have been some challenging times for the growing company. However, as you might expect from someone with as much experience and determination as Hall, the company's growth strategy is ambitious and extremely strategic.

“The two most difficult things are financing and finding guys on the construction side that can pass a drug test,” Hall said. “I hate to say it, but it's true. To reduce some of the labor involved, we're in the process of figuring out how to sell our docks as packages on Amazon. Envision receiving a package and putting it together like a Lego set.”

Hall continued, “We're also looking to form relationships with other dock

builders and HOAs. I feel like we're building the iPhone and other builders are building the apps. Eventually we'd like to license our floating dock system to other dock builders. With KonaDocks, you can realize 50% profit margins without even having to pull permits. In regards to HOAs, we can build them a marina for free in exchange for allowing us to manage the marina and collect money from the boat slips. Under this arrangement, we can break even in just shy of a year. We're planning on rolling out this strategy this December."

Hall's most recent project involves utilizing his floating dock system to provide a place for solar panels to be installed without taking up valuable land. Under the name Float Solar, Hall is working with solar panel manufacturers and those looking to generate clean and renewable energy to provide them with a unique opportunity.

"In China, they have these huge solar farms on lakes and ponds," he said. "Until now, the U.S. hasn't really done anything like that. There's one company out of France trying to do it here, but we figured we could do it better and cheaper. We want to put them in retention ponds, not on prime property. We just sold a 250 panel system this past week. We also have plans to deploy them on a 13 acre lake we own in Polk County. We're shooting to generate 3.5 megawatts."

Looking ahead, Hall is focused on growing KonaDocks and Float Solar. He anticipates that KonaDocks, which is on track to do \$2.3 Million in sales this year, will double that next year. Being the serial entrepreneur that he is, Hall is also in the process of buying a railing company out of Wisconsin. They have 40 locations nationwide, but currently do not have a presence in Florida. In fact, according to Hall, there are no handrail

manufacturing companies operating in the state of Florida. He intends to change that and will look to make handrails for his docks, apartment complexes and other applications.

What advice does Hall have for aspiring entrepreneurs? “Execute and ready fire,” he said. “People will try to make a product so awesome before they bring it to market. That’s not the best way to do it. If you have it, bring it and tell people it’s a beta version. If it doesn’t stick, move on. Keep trying things until something works. I have a professional goal to get better every week. My goal is to do 3% better than the week before. Lastly, don’t quit your day job to start your own business if you have a family and kids that depend on you.

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