



PILOT PETE'S WEATHERS PANDEMIC STORM TO INCREASE REVENUE, PROFITS

After 25 years as one of Chicagoland's favorite casual eateries, Pilot Pete's—like countless businesses around the world—hit a bit of turbulence around March 2020.

But as fate would have it, Pilot Pete's Owner, John Minginas, had recently been approached by Next Level Northwest's Schaumburg Economic Director, Matt Frank. Frank suggested Minginas join NLNW's 90-day business accelerator program.

Today, Minginas credits his decision to join the program with not only getting Pilot Pete's back on its feet after the worst of the pandemic, but also with moving the restaurant into its most successful season yet.

Indeed, since his time in the program, Minginas has used his learnings to grow the restaurant's revenue and profits, increase Pilot Pete's customer base and even expand his team's headcount.

A LOCAL TREASURE

Renowned for their friendly service and American comfort food, the flight-themed eatery is located at the Schaumburg Regional Airport and offers stunning views of aircraft take offs and landings.

"My philosophy is, 'Nobody leaves hungry, everybody's happy,'" Minginas said. "That's our goal."

It's a philosophy that delivers. Pilot Pete's is a local darling that's kept its fans coming back year after year—and traveling miles for their famous chicken fingers. It's even been featured by WGN TV as one of "Chicago's Best Family Spots."

However, according to Minginas, there was still plenty to learn from the business accelerator program and his coach, Sybil Ege.

COACHING THROUGH A STORM

"You gain a lot from this program," Minginas recalled. "Every week it gets better and better."

But to start, Ege and Minginas focused on getting Pilot Pete's through the storm of COVID-19.

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John Minginas, owner, Pilot Pete's

"In the beginning of 2020, we closed completely for a few months," Minginas remembered. "We were losing staff. It was tough for all businesses, not just mine. But it was a disaster."

Aside from pandemic-response management, Ege helped Minginas with inventory control and brand management. They also came up with a new menu and conducted online market research. Thanks to Ege's support and research, Pilot Pete's was able to re-open for lunch—with even tastier specials.

"She did a phenomenal job. I would recommend her to anybody," Minginas said. "She was very knowledgeable, understanding, [and] to the point—a great coach."

"[Ege]'s coaching really helped reduce the everyday tensions of managing a business," he continued. "It's absolutely worth the time investment."

LOOKING AHEAD

Now, two years later, Minginas said he continues to apply lessons he learned from the accelerator program. He added he's proud of what he and his team have accomplished with help from Ege and NLNW, and he's hoping to keep the ball rolling and expand the business.

"We've pretty much doubled the business in the last 15 years," he said. "I'm very proud of the staff and what they do; I love my staff."

ABOUT NEXT LEVEL NORTHWEST

Next Level Northwest is a not-for-profit business accelerator program that supports existing local businesses. The program was founded by five Northwest Chicagoland municipalities—Elk Grove Village, Hanover Park, Hoffman Estates, Rolling Meadows, and Schaumburg—as a public-private partnership to support regional and local businesses through collaborative and innovative initiatives to help grow local economies. To learn more about Next Level Northwest or to submit an application for your company to join the next class of companies in the business accelerator program, visit www.nextlevelnorthwest.org.

THE PATH TO SUCCESS STARTS HERE



To get started, visit NextLevelNorthwest.org and/or contact your local Economic Development Director for more information.

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