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CEO of title company finds strong footing in new places

BY SEBASTIEN BAUGE
sbauge@bizjournals.com

INNOVATOR
Frank Busch III

TITLE: President and CEO
COMPANY: Thomas Title and Escrow
AGE: 35
YEARS ON THE JOB: 4
EDUCATION: Bachelor's degree in business administration, University of Arizona; Juris Doctorate, Hastings College of Law
BEST PARTS OF JOB: Strategic business development and landing big clients
HARDEST PART OF JOB: Managing people

Frank Busch III started his title insurance company in 2006 with no direct experience. Today, Thomas Title and Escrow has survived the worst of the housing crisis by focusing on commercial title work.

Busch started dealing with title companies while providing corporate counsel to First National Bank of Arizona. He had wanted to move into business after law, but he didn't expect his next career to be title insurance.

"I had zero experience in the industry. I didn't know who the players were or how it worked," he said. "I was young and dumb."

Busch likened the transition to becoming a fast food restaurant manager after having been only a customer. He said he was familiar with the operations, but he wasn't "gonna jump in and flip the burgers."

What Busch did know was how to get the company going.

"The people who knew how to do this work existed already. My job was to go find these people and bring them together under the same roof," he said.

The fledgling title company took a hit along with the rest of the economy in 2007. Busch believes Thomas Title survived because of an unwillingness to quit.

"We were just really scrappy," he said. "We hustled for deals, and we went after the right ones."

Busch also adapted to the depressed market by cementing the agency's focus on commercial real estate and foreclosure-related work. He said many title companies focusing almost exclusively on the commercial side weren't able to survive.

"We took an old process, and we innovat-

ed. We mixed some things up," he said.

Last year was the company's best to date, Busch said. Revenue grew by 50 percent and profits doubled, though he would not disclose specific figures. Thomas Title also more than doubled its employee base, from six in 2008 to 13 by the end of last year.

Outside his job, Busch adheres to a strict workout regimen under Scottsdale-based Baumans Xtreme Training. The program's founder, Andy Bauman, was featured in *Sports Illustrated* for training the Phoenix Suns Gorilla. Busch's workout is a non-stop hour of exercise in a room kept at 100 degrees.

Busch also is active in the community. He has served on the executive council of Boys & Girls Clubs of Metropolitan Phoenix for the past three years. In addition, he is involved with HomeBase Youth Services and is a member of the board of governors of the Hastings College of Law at the University of California.



Pump It Up owners looking for sites, franchisees in New Mexico

BY MEGAN KAMERICK
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Pump It Up, based in Tempe, is seeking franchisees for its first locations in New Mexico.

The concept is geared toward children's parties, but the company also handles corporate team-building events and business meetings.

The company looks for industrial or flex space of about 10,000 square feet, which it fills with huge inflatable slides and other structures. It's a turn-key operation for children's parties, with the owners providing a "party menu" that parents can use to choose food, decorations and activities.

Pump It Up also trains its franchisees on offering corporate team-building activities, according to Sean Bock, vice president

of franchise development and real estate.

Tregaron Capital Co., a private equity firm, purchased the company in 2007 and bundled it with a similar concept called BounceU. The company has 165 Pump It Up locations and plans to add 10 to 12 more this year in markets including Albuquerque, Boston, Miami and Orlando, Fla.

Bock said the company believes the recession presents a chance to find lower-cost space with some tenant improvement allowances.

The buy-in for franchisees ranges from \$350,000 to \$600,000, Bock said. There is some potential for the cost to be lower because of the weak commercial real estate market these days, he added.

Megan Kamerick is a staff writer with the *New Mexico Business Weekly*, a sister publication.