For Immediate Release & Consideration

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It All Started with Pizza, Margaritas, and Three Friends

It’s not a boardroom, there’s no conference table or uncomfortable chairs and there are clearly no suits. It’s just another day in paradise. It’s Douglas, Michigan, a hot September day and three friends are unwinding after a day of moving furniture. Of course, there are the requisite margaritas and pizza underscoring the brainstorming and the abundance of laughter.

From this fun infused “What if?” backdrop would emerge a life altering idea. It was this setting, this day in 1998 when partners Mike Jones, Danny Esterline and Greg Tryzbinski came up with the idea to buy a gay bar.

Many dream but few dare and margaritas add the needed perspective. According to Jones, “We were at points in our lives where it just seemed right. Maybe you shouldn't eat pizza, drink margaritas and try to plan your life, but you just never know what's going to happen.”

The next day, idea in mind, no plan on paper, and amazingly hangover free, the three amigos called their friend, and realtor, Lynda Holmes who began moving their idea towards realization. The rest of their lives were about to change, as was the gay scene in the Midwest.

A Dream Becomes Reality: Owning One of the Largest LGBTQ Resorts in the Midwest

Nine months later, on May 26, 1999, the trio took ownership of The Douglas Dunes, renaming it The Dunes Resort and now referred to by most as simply The Dunes.

2017 marks 36 years since the Douglas Dunes first welcomed curious gay men and women to Douglas. Through hard work and an unwavering dedication to providing the best in service, hospitality and perpetuating a gay safe haven, The Dunes Resort has become one of the largest LGBTQ resorts and entertainment complexes in the Midwest, and no doubt one of the five biggest in the United States.

In the summer of 2010, Bump! (Logo TV’s first gay and lesbian travel and lifestyle TV series) visited and toured the communities of Saugatuck and Douglas and then told their audience of more than 30 million viewers that The Dunes is, without question, Western Michigan's premier gay vacation destination while being the pinnacle of the gay Saugatuck/Douglas community.

The Dunes Resort is a popular destination for a gay friendly vacation, with most guests coming from Chicago, followed by Indianapolis, Detroit, Milwaukee and St. Louis. Located two and a half hours by car from Chicago and three hours from Detroit, the Dunes LGBTQ resort sprawls over 22 acres, with 81 hotel rooms and six bars, including western Michigan's largest gay dance bar and a cabaret with live entertainment and a game room, plus a fantastic view of the outdoor patio bar and a larger than large pool and pool bar.

“The Dunes can be a lot of different things for a lot of different people. To me, it's a little slice of heaven in the middle of western Michigan where it's traditionally pretty conservative,” said Jones.

They’re a diverse trio, personal and professional partners, who work together like a well-tuned machine to make The Dunes a great place. Jones is an Indiana native, who earned a hospitality degree from Purdue University, then lived in Chicago and worked at a design magazine before spreading his entrepreneurial wings. Esterline has a political
background and serves as the “I can fix anything man.” Trzybinski comes from a banking background and takes care of everything financial. 

**A Gay Vacation Destination for All Walks of Life**

In addition to being considered a gay institution in the Midwest, The Dunes Resort is also a family affair, providing a comfortable gay vacation destination for the whole family. Sharon, Mike’s mom, is Head of Housekeeping, and makes certain good order is kept and the premises immaculate. Of course, all the time beaming with pride over what her son and his partners have accomplished. Jones, with a ready smile and enthusiasm shining from behind his eyes, sums it up simply by saying, “It all works.”

Almost 80 percent of the clientele is gay men. During the two annual women's weekends, the mix changes and the resort become about 90 percent women. All in all, the normal mix is 50 percent singles, 50 percent couples. And, yes, that includes straight, gay-friendly customers—especially since The Dunes regularly hosts events for various LGBTQ communities, including leather, lesbian, bears and transgender.

Guests at The Dunes are truly a rainbow with every flavor represented: circuit kids, couples, retirees, twinks, bears, lesbians and so many more. "At the end of our first summer, I got emotional. I was looking around, everyone was having fun and then I thought, 'Wow, this is ours.' That was a little overwhelming," Jones said.

“People from all walks of life come here to find themselves, lose themselves, but most importantly, to be themselves. You can be gay, straight, old or young, and feel comfortable here,” Jones commented.

"We have a lot of stories of people who have met their partners here and now plan their vacations here on an annual basis," Jones said. "Whether you're 21 or 85, it's home, it’s welcoming and anyone can come to The Dunes and have a good time. For the local gay community The Dunes is Ground Zero, it's home."

The resort offers a kaleidoscope of entertainment, from raucous to romantic. From strippers to live entertainment and cabaret to great DJs to a quiet romantic weekend, The Dunes makes it happen for their guests. The variety of offerings tailored to varied tastes, is among the many reasons people return year after year after year, and find the Dunes as one of the best gay vacation destinations in the country.

**Celebrating 36Years — Our Biggest Party Yet!**

The Dunes Resort kicks off its 2016 season—its 35th year—in early April with Mr. Dunes Leather Contest, TG Prom, and Bear Weekend, followed by the Anniversary Weekend and the return of hugely popular HoeDown in The Dunes in May. Every weekend in the sunny summer months create a reason to be at the Dunes. For those looking for the biggest crowds, the big three include Memorial Day weekend with DJ Matt Consola and Susan Morabito, followed by the annual Red White on Blue Star event, held over Independence Day weekend, which features appearances by Roland Belmares, Alain Jackinsky, Joe Gauthreaux, Jalil Z, Ralph Rosario and Barry Harris. Lastly, the Summer's Going To Come Again party over Labor Day weekend will incorporate Tony Moran and Phil B. However, every weekend throughout the Spring, Summer, and Fall guarantees a good time.
It’s a really great place where life is lived and enjoyed without pretense. Speaking for the partners, Jones truly believes that "everyone who comes here feels good and feels comfortable. You can be sitting at the bar with lesbians on one side, a cross-dresser on the other side and everyone is just having fun." He went on to say that "This is a very welcoming place, regardless of what you like, what you don't like, how much money you make, how much money you don't make, what you're wearing, etc."

Today’s Dunes Resort is rich with history from the original Douglas Dunes which was opened in 1981 by Carl Jennings and Larry Gammons to welcome curious gay men and women to Douglas (Saugatuck) Michigan. What grew into The Douglas Dunes was an idea that took shape at what was the drive-in Amity Motel. Today’s Dunes, a continuation of the good memories, is much different than the original 22 hotel rooms, restaurant, and lobby bar with summer-only outside dancing.

The current partners hold Carl and Larry in high esteem and believe it was their love for the area combined with a desire to have people explore and visit this beautiful little community that was one of the basic reasons for creating The Dunes LGBTQ.

Jennings and Gammons still reside in the Douglas community. Throughout the years, under their guidance, entertainers in fields spanning every format from pop and porn have appeared. Answering varied tastes has resulted in a nightlife that defies eclectic and a dance floor running the gamut from progressive to hard-rock music.

Expressing the thoughts of his partners, Jones said, “Our guests are very important to us, they are the backbone of our business and because of them our business has grown every year. We listen to what they tell us and use their thoughts to make our product better every year. Absolutely, it can still be stressful at times, but it's still so much fun. I wake up every morning and just think that I'm so blessed.”

And with one last thought, Jones commented, “Come join the party… it’s a Celebration.”

Watch BumpTV Travel Show on Saugatuck/Douglas & The Dunes Resort

For more information:

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