

Program Director, Nicole Chaland, of SFU's Certificate Program for Community Economic Development met Joey Hundert on Cortes Island at the 17th annual Social Venture Institute: where social change meets business. She shares this story about Joey calling him "A Carnie for the Caring Generation."

Though it may have been death that initiated the birth of the world's first "green" travelling midway rides — Sustainival — it's a fierce passion for the life of future generations that drives the owner of this unusual business venture. Joey Hundert, who's now 31, was born a twin, but his other half died just three months later. The early tragedy left Hundert with an overpowering sense of empathy. "It left a giant hole," he says. "I think that is why I feel people's suffering so acutely. I've had to train myself to be amongst places in society where unhappiness is the common state."

Since his teenage years, he's immersed himself in entrepreneurial ventures, later building a reputation developing sustainable ideas and technologies that have led, most recently, to his Edmonton-based enterprise, Innovaculture, an Agriculture 2.0 company specializing in indoor, sustainable food production.

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But it's Hundert's carnival, that began touring the U.S. and Canada this year, that's creating the buzz. And feeding his desire to make people smile. After all, who doesn't love a carnival? Especially a 25-ride environmentally sustainable one that runs on vegetable oil.

"My career is the result of my need to use my life to improve quality of life and reduce suffering for as many people as I can," admits Hundert. The Hamilton native started his first company at age 14, fixing neighbour's computers growing up in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. He was called "the computer tutor". He was attracted to commerce but recalls developing a bit of a world view, and deciding that business was the root of all evil. That could have easily been dismissed as the naïve discontent of a teenager, but it foreshadowed Hundert's destiny.

Jobs followed. Every one of them made him think about how to do things differently. Running a chainsaw while fighting forest fires in Colorado, Hundert realized he was operating a massively destructive tool, though using it responsibly, and with integrity, to reduce negative outcomes and save a forest.

"With that epiphany, the tool is agnostic. What occurs with the tool is dependent

on the operator. I realized I could operate the tool called business for good and for change.”



Figure 1: Joey, on his way to SVI 2012

Other factors then came into play. Hundert was leafing through an issue of a magazine called *Colors*, which was devoted to waste and trash and made the argument that a lot of what we throw away ends up in communities where they can do the least about it.

“So I sold my car on eBay that night. I decided that the organizing principles of life were smart enough to provide sustainable means to meet needs. Those principles and technologies needed to be discovered and put to work. I realized I could operate a business with integrity to advance sustainability. I chose that my life would be for forwarding sustainability through enterprise and I got to work pretty quick.”

Almost immediately, Hundert came up with a number of potential ventures involving vehicles running on waste vegetable oil — including taxi and bus fleet, even one where ubiquitous Volkswagen vans (the VeggieVagen) would be wrapped in advertising for sustainable companies — but none of them would start. “I learned two things: I

still didn’t have the chops to negotiate. And the industry is brutal.”

Hundert took a job with a property development firm redeveloping a hospital into a wellness centre. “I was plunged into business. I learned the vernacular. The CEO approved my proposal to go green. I looked at the market for sustainable business products and my next conclusion was, if the products don’t exist I will create them.”

Fast forward. Hundert became a hired ace in the business world, honed his skills, consulted, and even started in with a venture capital outfit. However, working for someone else never worked out. Dozens of sustainable business ideas were left on the table, bogged down by red tape and political instability — and someone else making the decisions. “I decided that was the end of working on other people’s ventures. I was 28 when I decided to go on my own.”

There was another thread that wove into the story about the same time. In 2009, Hundert found out that his mother was terminally ill. Brain cancer. And her death gave Hundert another blast of insight to change. “That was the beginning of my adulthood. Everything in life came into perspective for the first time. I stopped being a kid.”

Or, in a way, maybe he started becoming a kid again. A kid who dreamt up a carnival that would magically run on vegetable oil thrown away into a hotel’s garbage. “I thought about a biodiesel Gravitron.” The Gravitron was one ride that soon became an entire midway. The world’s first green carnival. The test run was January, 2011: four rides, 6,000 people. Four months later, Sustainival

pulled into Little Rock, Arkansas with 16 rides and entertained a crowd of 250,000.

Returning to Edmonton in August, 2011, Hundert's sustainable carnival set up for 650,000 people. "We had 14 rides, four games, and a giant veggie-powered DJ lounge. Families danced on a waste veggie sound system for 10 days. We had 46 DJ's. That story went around the world. We had interest from all over: music fests, street fairs."

For 2013, Hundert has brand new plans for Sustainival - a concept no one has seen before: the world's first Eco Carnival Race for kids & youth. Fun challenges and team competition will land grand prizewinners their names on a cheque for \$20,000 to give to any cause in the world of their choosing. "They can even choose to invest in something awesome in their own community."

The hustle of the carnie in him was impetus to start off in another sustainable direction. Hundert knew those standard, made-in-China carnival prizes, teddy bears and other stuffed animals, were crafted from petroleum. Surely an eco-fair had to have eco-prizes. Hundert looked to wood as he continued to write his sustainable business narrative.

"Wood is such a great storyteller. It's a material that engenders legacy." He found a company that made beautiful wooden watches and made that the fair's grand prize. "What else can we make out of wood? I thought sunglasses would be cool."

Hundert got into designing and prototyping wooden sunglasses, then

some advice from his brother turned him on to a wooden iPhone case — all made in China. "After three months of quality problems and tying up capital, I brought all our products and production home to Canada," explains Hundert. "Thus began the journey manufacturing in the most expensive manufacturing market." Knottycase was launched at the end of summer in Edmonton, with all manufacturing done in the Alberta capital and for every 12,500 iPhone cases sold, Hundert will plant an entire grove of Coast Redwoods through a program called Save The Redwoods League.

Hundert and his wife, Erin, have a toddler named Lowell, named after Hundert's twin brother who passed away just after childbirth. "Being a Dad is the best thing that has ever happened."

Hat tip to the Edmonton Social Enterprise Fund who were early investors in Sustainival
socialenterprisefund.ca

Sustainival
sustainival.com

Knottycase
knottycase.com

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