

Top-selling Franchisee Earns Italy Trip and Great Quality of Life



If Hollywood ever needs an idea for a reality TV show, they should send their camera-crew to follow Mark Berggren around.

Granted, there would have to be some editing since much of Berggren's life as an Our Town America franchisee probably wouldn't make riveting television. He generally starts his days, dropping his kids off at school, and then he works at home from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., often at a computer.

And, yet, some of what would be filmed probably would make great TV. Berggren says that, over the years, "I've met everybody from dentists to pizza drivers to pet shop owners."

And when you do that, you start to pick up things.

Berggren can probably now make a pizza about as well as any pizzeria. He has learned a lot about how car washes are run, discussing how much water typical

facilities use in a day and what type of environmental regulations govern these businesses. He has a good understanding of how to treat back pain from all the chiropractors he's talked with. And, once, when trying to get a pet storeowner to sign on as a client, he wound up holding a python.

It wasn't something Berggren planned on. "I said that I was afraid of snakes," Berggren recalls, "and the guy said, 'Well, there's no better time to learn not to be than now.'"

Before Our Town America.

Berggren used to be a litigation consultant throughout his twenties. As his LinkedIn page puts it, his job was to "offer a wide range of electronic solutions and paper products to the legal and corporate community. Technical sales dealing in imaging/coding, data conversion, forensic evidence, and web-based repositories."

It was more interesting than it sounds, we think, but at the same time, Berggren often faced many challenges. For one, as attorneys started going digital, some of what Berggren was offering simply wasn't needed. It was also a stressful job, working with anxious attorneys going to trial, so when Berggren's older sister, Kathy, a headhunter at the time, mentioned Our Town America in the summer of 2006, the then-33-year-old found himself instantly intrigued.

Berggren had recently moved from Chicago to the suburbs, so related to the premise of Our Town America.

By September 2006, he found himself flying to the Our Town America headquarters in Florida to discuss becoming a franchisee. Before the year was up, Berggren had gone through a month and a half of training and was open for business.

Open for business.

Chicago is a tough city from a marketing standpoint, Berggren says. He isn't sure why that is.

Still, over the last 13 years, Berggren has made things work.

"I think it's personal consistency," he says.

In other words, he has worked hard, been committed and remained positive. He has been careful to find clients who he knows are a good fit for the Our Town America New Mover Program. After all, if you have to convince a client to sign up that isn't a great match, they aren't likely to remain a client anyway.

Berggren is always eager to find restaurants, dental offices or car washes that want to be a part of the New Mover Program. But, one time – and this is one of the reasons we think Berggren needs his own reality show – he had a meeting with a startup entrepreneur who wanted to sell paraphernalia related to the cannabis industry, at a time when legal marijuana wasn't exactly a thing. Berggren says: "I kept thinking, 'This is a joke, right?'"

Not surprisingly, the startup entrepreneur did not end up becoming a client.

But while there were those types of dead ends, Berggren kept at it, and he saw his sales steadily climb over the years. In fact, they climbed so much that, earlier this year, as is the practice for top-selling Our Town America franchise owners, he won a free trip to Italy with his wife – paid for by Our Town America.



Mark & Kelle Berggren at Italy's Leaning Tower of Pisa during their earned free vacation.

Berggren says that being an Our Town America franchise owner has been a great experience. His wife, Kelle, is a dermatologist whose work schedule is generally booked out a year in advance. Berggren usually has his calendar mapped out a week in advance, so he has been able to carve out a career where, if needed, he can shuttle their kids – who are now 14, 12 and 10 years old.

"It's a career that has given me a structure that I like, while simultaneously providing flexibility," Berggren says.

He says he also loves that the Our Town America franchise model provides him the opportunity to meet with hundreds of small business owners like himself. "It's kind of an insider's look into each of these industries to see what type of daily schedule they run," Berggren says. For instance, restaurant owners have to be very hands-on – often working evenings and weekends. Berggren says that, over the years, he has gained a newfound appreciation for practically every industry he partners with.

"It's been really fascinating meeting with these business owners," Berggren says. "Every day can be different from the one before." He is very pleased with the path he has chosen for himself – no camera crew tailing he and his family needed.