

## **Franchisee Spotlight: Joe Nichols, Jr.**

### **Franchisee's story of overcoming obstacles is now featured in nationally released book.**

When Houston franchise owner, Joe Nichols, Jr., learned he was paralyzed after a car accident nearly 23 years ago, his initial feeling of despair soon gave way to hope as he recognized the power of a positive attitude. Joe's inspirational story was recently included in a nationally released book entitled, *Success Built to Last: Creating a Life that Matters*, which was co-authored by the writer of *Built to Last*, a national bestseller with more than 1 million copies sold.

Now Joe's story of hope, determination and persistence will be shared by thousands of people all over the United States. Of course, his story has long inspired members of the Unishippers family since it is a testament to how the right mix of courage, entrepreneurial spirit and a good idea can create success, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

### **Accident and Aftermath**

On February 18, 1984, Joe was driving on a slick road after a rainstorm when he swerved to miss oncoming traffic. His car careened into a ditch and rolled, which resulted in serious spinal cord injuries that left the 20-year old a quadriplegic. Although he eventually gained some function in his hand and arms, Joe remains confined to a wheelchair.

"When the accident first happened, my initial thoughts were, 'Why did this have to happen to me?' I couldn't understand why life had dealt me this hand," Joe admits. "Eventually, though, I realized that I needed to stop asking 'why' and start asking 'What am I going to do about it?'"

Once Joe started asking this question, he was able to reject the idea of victimization and find a real sense of purpose in life. "When you play the blame game and focus on the negative, the person that suffers the most is you," he says. "I had to simply pick up the pieces and move forward, one day at a time." Joe says it was then that he realized that, despite his injury, his life could still have meaning and purpose — that he could still make a contribution in this world.

"I knew that I really needed to have some education in order to do anything in life," Joe says. "Many people said I would never be able to earn a college degree. In fact, many of my doctors said I would most likely be in a nursing home for the rest of my life," Joe recalls. Determined to prove them wrong, Joe enrolled in the University of Texas at Arlington, and despite enormous odds, he graduated in 1990 with a business major with an emphasis in marketing and finance.

### **Building Business Relationships**

Anxious to do something positive with his life and develop some network contacts, Joe decided to join the Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1986. Commonly known as the "Jaycees," the organization exists to give young adults the tools they need to be successful in business development, management skills and community service. The Jaycees took Joe under their wing and gave him many wonderful opportunities, including the chance to develop leadership skills while serving as president of the Arlington chapter from 1988 to 1989. Under his leadership, the chapter expanded from about 30 members to more than 200 members, and Joe and his fellow Jaycees raised a lot of money for charitable causes.

Joe says his experience in the Jaycees was extremely positive and impacted his life significantly. Through his association with the Jaycees, Joe met Danny Cook and Randy Standly, who would eventually become his business partners in a fledgling franchise idea called Unishippers.

Joe recalls that during his first meeting with Unishippers CEO Steve Nelson, there were no fancy PowerPoint presentations or slick marketing materials to promote the Unishippers concept. It was just Steve Nelson with a scribble notebook who showed him the numbers, which Joe says turned out to be quite accurate. He and his partners quickly recognized the incredible potential of the relatively simple concept of Unishippers, and they decided to purchase a franchise in Houston. Eventually, Randy Standly married Joe's sister, Melisa, and Danny Cook moved to Arkansas with his wife Karla to pursue Unishippers opportunities there.

### Becoming a Family Man

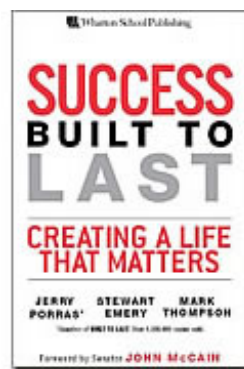
Joe's association with the Jaycees also contributed to his meeting his wife Bonnie. He had organized a Jaycee luncheon at the restaurant where Bonnie worked. And after meeting Joe, Bonnie asked Danny Cook to give Joe her phone number. With a little nagging from Danny, Joe eventually got up the courage to ask Bonnie out. "Once she agreed to go on a date, I told her that she would have to drive, because I don't," Joe jokes. The couple quickly hit it off, and after two years of courtship and engagement, they were married.



Joe says his marriage to Bonnie has been a huge blessing in his life. "Bonnie doesn't let me have an excuse for anything," he reports. "She regularly pushes me out of my comfort zone and, because of that, I have done many things and traveled places that I probably wouldn't have otherwise."

Today, the couple has two beautiful children: a six-year old boy, Karsten, and a three-year-old girl, Karyss. They have a large home on three acres of land and enjoy activities that most other families enjoy, such as camping and traveling.

In fact, it was while on a cruise to the Mexican Riviera two years ago, that Joe and his family met business professional and author, Mark Thompson. The two families sat at the same table in the ship's dining room and became good friends. At the end of the cruise, Mark got Joe's contact information and promised to keep in touch. Months later, Mark called and told Joe he was writing a book with Stewart Emery and Jerry Porras (co-author of national bestseller *Built to Last*). The book was to be a compilation of face-to-face, unscripted conversations with hundreds of remarkable people from around the world. Joe was flattered and somewhat surprised to be asked to participate, but readily agreed.



The book, which was released nationally earlier this year, includes interviews with billionaires, CEOs, presidents of nations and Nobel laureates, as well as unsung heroes (like Joe) who have achieved lasting impact without obvious power or charisma. Joe's story is featured in Chapter 8, "Wounds to Wisdom."

### Looking to the Future

The last 16 years with Unishippers have been wonderful for Joe and his entire family. Today Dabar LP has ownership in seven franchises — Houston, Beaumont, Waco, San Antonio, Texas SE, Texas West and Brownsville and performs administrative work for several others. (Incidentally, the word Dabar has biblical origins, and also is an acronym for “Doing admirable business achieves results.”)

In 2005, the Nichols built a new 7,500 square foot building to house its growing Unishippers office, effectively doubling the size of its previous location in leased space a few miles away. Joe says it’s one of the best things they have ever done. “When we moved in, morale just skyrocketed because having our own place was a manifestation of real success,” Joe explains, adding that the move shows that Unishippers is here to stay. “It has created a lot of positive energy here.”

Joe marvels at how far both he and Unishippers have come in the last 16 years. “When we started with Unishippers, we really had only one carrier and one product. We advertised with really basic flyers to potential customers. Our billing system was very simplistic and, quite frankly, very archaic,” Joe says. In contrast, today’s Unishippers is so much more dynamic and the opportunities are ten-fold to what they were when they started in 1990. “We have so much more to offer our customers today — great technology tools, great service options — I think the future of Unishippers is incredibly bright,” Joe says. And speaking of bright futures, Joe’s positive attitude and courage in spite of his ongoing challenges, will ensure a bright one for him.