

Fan and entrepreneur paints his bright future

Paintball business has many paths for growth, coming improvements

By GREGORY JONES

John Johnson has used his passion for paintball and his drive to work for himself to start Running Wild Paintball Inc.

"I've always wanted my own business revolving around paintball. The market is growing and expanding so quickly that if I didn't start a field, somebody else would," says Johnson, a recent graduate of Nunda High School.

Running Wild, located at 9008 Pentagas Road in Nunda, Livingston County, opened its doors this summer.

The company offers

numerous courses to play paintball as well as paint gun repair and maintenance.

Johnson, 18, last

year attended the Paintball Technical Institute. The program offered seven courses on paintball ranging from becoming a professional referee to maintaining and repairing guns.

"What they did for the guns was they sat us down for two or three weeks and gave us the guns to work on," Johnson says. "The last three days of class they gave us over a dozen guns to fix and repair that they had purposely broke.

"You had to fix each and every gun right to pass the class."

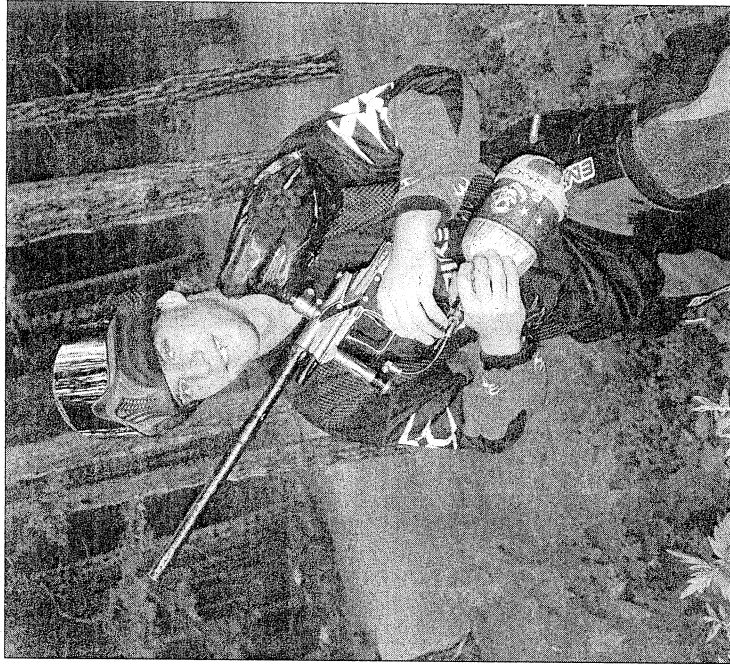


Photo by Kimberly McKinzie
John Johnson started his business this summer on 37 acres with several different fields. He plans to add a scenario course and host a clinic for tournament ball.

Not only did he take the gun repair course, but he enrolled in the other six courses as well. When Johnson completed the program he was ready to be a referee, a paintball field owner and a master air smith.

"It was an experience, that's for sure," Johnson says.

He also completed the Young Entrepreneurs Academy program, offered by the University of Rochester, which teaches

young students how to take an idea or product and start and run a business.

Running Wild, which opened in June, occupies 37 acres of rented land where the paintball games are played. It has several different fields of play to choose from—a woods ball field, which includes bunkers and natural woodlands to hide behind, and two speedball courses.

Running Wild serves all age groups and all types of skill levels, Johnson says.

"We get just about everybody," he says. "We get more males than females though."

Running Wild supplies gear for those who need it. A gun and masks can be rented for \$10; paintballs cost \$15 for 500, Johnson says.

Players with gear pay only a \$10 entry fee, Johnson says. Every Friday Running Wild lets people play for free. The fields are open Friday, from 5 p.m. until dark and over the weekend starting at noon. Johnson is the firm's sole employee—he gets help from family members when needed.

Running Wild does have a few competitors in the Rochester area, but Johnson says

he already has the upper hand. N'Vasion Paintball LLC in Rochester, he says, offers only indoor fields, and GRC Paintball in Angelica, Allegany County, offers both indoor and outdoor fields. Johnson says his firm offers a variety of play as well as equipment repairs that he does himself, and he is focused on making his business better.

"Everything that we're making goes back into improving the business more," Johnson says.

Johnson advertises his paintball business by posting flyers, print ads and using its Web site. Running Wild also hosts tournaments every other week for anyone who wants to sign up a team.

Johnson's plans for his company include building a scenario course, designed as a town, and hosting a clinic for tournament ball.

"Me and my little brother run a professional circuit and we're going to get a few other pros that we're friends with to come down and, like a soccer camp, help teach basic skills or help them tone the skills they already have," Johnson says.

In the next five years or so, he hopes to be able to build an indoor field for winter play and have turf for the speedball fields.

"I've been into paintball for about six years now and I love to play," Johnson says.

Gregory Jones is a Rochester Business Journal intern.

Fast Start is a biweekly feature focusing on young entrepreneurs. Send suggestions for future Fast Start stories to Associate Editor Smriti Jacob at sjacob@rbi.net.