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GOING GLOBAL

Jax connection 'Sparked' Berlin fest

A former Northeast Floridian now living in Berlin was the connection that solidified Elton Rivas' choice for the next city in which to launch One Spark.

People in nearly a dozen cities wanted to bring One Spark to their areas, but a meeting with Travis Todd, a Jacksonville University graduate who moved to Berlin seven years ago, sealed the deal. Todd, who also knew One Spark co-founder Dennis Eusebio from his time on the First Coast, introduced Rivas to Silicon Allee, a tech blog in Berlin that has agreed to help organize the fest.

In an e-mail interview, Todd said he looked forward to what One Spark could do to spur the innovative and entrepreneurial community that drew him to Berlin.

"We are not cloning One Spark and bringing it to Berlin," he wrote. "We are looking to establish the event as a



GETTY IMAGES

The Fernsehturm rises over Berlin.

keystone event internationally, so that it can evolve into its own event with the same goal as the One Spark in Jacksonville: Bring together doers with visionary ideas and those who can transform the vision into reality."

Founder of the company that publishes Silicon Allee, Todd has been co-founder and a technology officer at other startups.

A California native, Todd worked at The Robin Shep-

herd Group in Jacksonville before moving to Germany.

"Berlin's a super creative city," he said in an interview posted on YouTube. "I love the nightlife, the people, just the relaxed atmosphere."

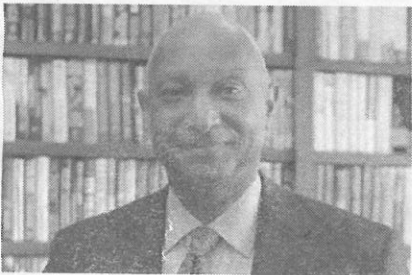
The only drawback: Access to successful investors. "It's getting better," he said, "but it's still not where it was in California."

In taking One Spark to Berlin, Rivas said his team looked at the demographics and found similarities in the makeup of Berlin's arts community and how "siloed" segments are not always connecting creators with the resources needed to bring projects to market.

Todd said he thought the beauty behind One Spark was that it combined elements of other successful events and brands.

THREE C'S

JIM STALLINGS



Few things are certain in the corporate world but according to former IBM executive Jim Stallings, three business concerns can be counted on to remain constant: customers, cash and competition.

How today's companies meet these challenges, however, is largely dependent on their ability to meet the demands of technology and a globally connected society.

Stallings, managing partner of Jacksonville-based private investment firm PS27 Ventures, shared with business leaders his tips for success gleaned from decades of experience in the international marketplace.

- ▶ Think on a global scale, both operationally and in terms of profitability.
- ▶ Your business needs to be ahead of the curve and predict market demand for a product or service.
- ▶ "You have to view innovation as an offensive strategy — you either do the disrupting or you are disrupted," Stallings added.
- ▶ Marketplace trends you can expect to see in coming years include software that analyzes data and makes human-like decisions based upon that information, medical devices that are auto-responsive and businesses going to where the customers are.

FINANCE

Vets jumping into startups

Though the number of Small Business Administration loans to veterans starting their own businesses has fluctuated in recent years, the agency expects to see even more veteran entrepreneurship with the launch of a new capital access initiative earlier this year.

Called SBA Veterans Advantage, the program, which started in January, eliminates the typical 13 percent upfront origination fee for SBA Express loans to qualified veterans.

"Veterans have the leadership skills and experience to become successful entrepreneurs and small-business owners. SBA supports veteran entrepreneurship and waiving the upfront guarantee fee is a benefit that can be passed on directly to veteran business owners, saving them thousands of dollars," said Wilfredo Gonzalez, director of the U.S. Small Business Administration's North Florida district.

The Navy Federal Credit Union is seeing growth in its loans to veterans as well.

"We are definitely experiencing an increase," said Susan Miller, a business account officer with the credit union's Jacksonville office.

Col. Richard Elam, who is still an active member of the Army, launched his iPlay LLC franchise in 2012 thanks to financing through a SBA-sponsored Patriot Express loan arranged through the Navy Federal Credit Union's Jacksonville office, which also offers lines of credit to its members.

"They made it real easy for my wife and I, and made the process go very

▶ BY THE NUMBERS

45

Number of average business loans per month to vets by the Navy Federal Credit Union of Jacksonville in 2013

48

Number of SBA loans for vet-owned businesses in the North Florida district in 2013

3.25%

Average prime lending rate for veterans

quickly," Elam, of St. Augustine, told the Business Journal.

The Elams' business rents mobile entertainment equipment like rock walls and laser tag setups for group events, such as community festivals, church gatherings and school fairs. But for military members who choose to retire, beginning a small business is part of their transition to civilian life.

"Many of them leverage the skill set they got in the military to the business world," said Jim Salmon, vice president of Navy Federal Credit Union, whose headquarters are in Virginia.

Salmon said many franchises like veterans to buy into their restaurant chains and other store locations because they are used to following set organizational protocols. Another 70 percent of veteran-owned businesses are startups.

5 THINGS

ENTREPRENEURS MUST LOOK BEFORE THEY LEAP



For as many startup businesses that break through the market, 100 don't. To avoid the pitfalls of becoming a casualty of the "startup graveyard," Stephen Kelly, an intellectual property attorney with Rogers Towers PA in Jacksonville, offers these tips:

- ▶ Define the company, including selecting co-founders and a management team to run the company. Also consider your entity type, what kind of control an equity ownership partner will have, and any tax liabilities you may have.
- ▶ Think about intellectual property issues, such as trademark and patent applications, as well as brand, name and logo selection.
- ▶ Evaluate and secure funding. Some things to think about: the relationship you'll have with the lender or investor, repayment terms and flexible financing methods.
- ▶ Leverage networking connections with other inventors, entrepreneurs, business partners and mentors.
- ▶ Have an "exit" plan: Yes, you need a contingency plan — and the time to make it is when things are going well. Issues to consider include loss of customers or business partners, ownership of company assets and other regulations for dissolving a business.