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## 100% PURE BUSINESS

**MICHAEL JOHNIGEAN**

turns his passion for health into a successful franchise

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# 100% Pure BUSINESS

Michael Johnnigan turns a passion for health into a successful business

By Ashley Cisneros

**M**ichael Johnnigan describes himself as a self-made man. The Jacksonville native and owner of HealthyWay Café has enjoyed incredible success since launching the organic restaurant in St. Johns Town Center in November 2006.

## A natural businessman

Johnnigan was bitten by the entrepreneurial bug while he was still in high school.

"I bought boats during the summers, fixed them up, and sold them for profit. My dad had me work at a car dealership every winter for four years. It was a good training ground for learning to be a businessman because I learned about human nature, persistence, and how to make a sale," he says.

At 20, Johnnigan purchased his first piece of property — a duplex. He fixed it up and sold it. Next, he purchased three fixer-uppers. He paid about \$10,000 for one, invested about \$7,500 in it, and sold it for \$35,000. Soon, Johnnigan founded MJ Investments and enjoyed a 15-year career in residential real estate.

Like many entrepreneurs, Johnnigan started several other companies, including River City Realty, Southern Home Lending, Fortress Title, and Kingsley Beach RV Park. In addition, he created InvestorClub.com, an innovative online real estate investment club, and USell.com. Johnnigan's experience in residential real estate paved the way for his interest in commercial real estate. Soon, he started developing waterfront commercial properties throughout the Jacksonville area and founded Empire Development Group.



Photos by Damon Craig

It was his experience as a developer that put Johnnigan on a path toward HealthyWay Café.

"As a developer, I traveled a lot and had to prepare my meals ahead of time in order to have things to eat throughout the day," he says. "There were only fast food choices and not too many nutritious options. Even the salads available at fast food restaurants were packed with preservatives."

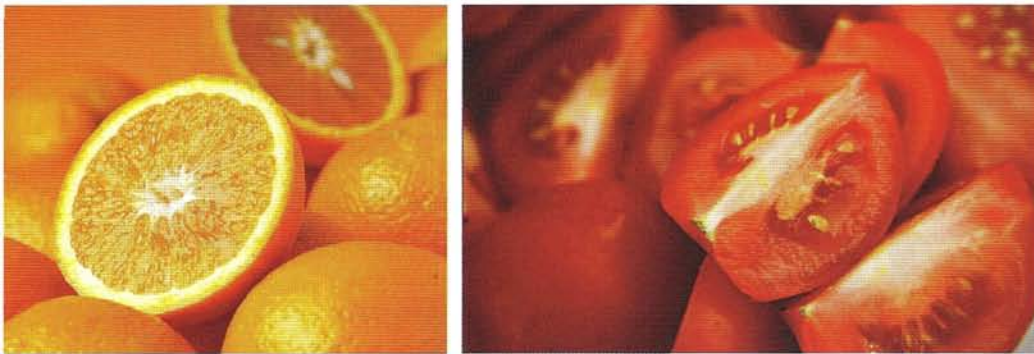
Johnnigan saw the shift in the real estate market as an opportunity to pursue his true passions — health and fitness. HealthyWay Café was born in 2006 as the first all-natural and organic, fast-casual restaurant franchise.

## Cooking up success

One of the most essential steps in building HealthyWay Café was creating the menu.

"It was important to me to include items that people were already familiar with. People know what sandwiches, salads, and wraps are," Johnnigan says. "One of my best-selling items





**"I've always loved to create things,"  
Johnnigan says. "Nothing gets me going  
than creating something out of nothing."**

is the Meal Pack. We take a box and pack it with delicious steamed brown rice, meat, or beans and veggies. It's tasty and nutritional."

You won't find any soft drinks in HealthyWay Café. Instead, the restaurant's juice bar features sparkling teas, juices, bottled water, flavored organic water, and original smoothies.

"It took me a year and a half to formulate HealthyWay Supplements," Johnnigan says. "I sat down with a chemist with the objective to make the healthiest, best-tasting supplements. Now we can't keep them on our shelves. Having our own supplements gives us an edge over our competitors because they don't carry our supplement line."

Other customer favorites include HealthyWay Café's oil-free chicken quesadillas, which are prepared in the oven, and organic banana splits.

"The banana splits are about 369 calories," Johnnigan says. "We sell about 20 of those per day."

He also invested in a reverse osmosis system for HealthyWay Café. "The water we use to wash our veggies and cook with

is completely free from chemicals," Johnnigan says. "We're completely green. All of our paper products are from recycled, biodegradable material."

### Healthy growth

Despite launching HealthyWay Café in a troubled economy, Johnnigan has experienced significant growth. In addition to the first location on Midtown Parkway, he has two franchise restaurants in Jacksonville.

"No matter what economy you're in, there's no replacement for quality. We have great products and excellent services. Our customers see the difference in the way we do business," Johnnigan says. "They acquire a taste for us, and they're hooked. I don't think that people mind paying for quality; they just need to know that they're getting their money's worth."

Since starting to offer franchising last year, Johnnigan has received at least 200 applications from prospective entrepreneurs. He plans to open 20 corporate locations across the country within the next three years, which will serve as

HealthyWay Café is more than a restaurant; it is a cyber road to healthy living. Johnnigan is harnessing the power of the Internet to market his brand and provide additional services to his customers through HealthyWayClub.com and HealthyWay.net.

Johnnigan's HealthyWayClub.com is a social network that allows like-minded users to support one another in staying fit and eating smart. Site members can use a nutrition counter to plan meals and keep track of calories, plus rate photos, read blogs and join interest groups.

"Users will be able to post classified ads, create events and invite friends to join HealthyWay Club.com," Johnnigan says.

The Web site boasts key features that have become standards across popular social networking sites including a calendar, user profile, capabilities, a forum, and polls. The Web site is up, but it is still developing and should be completely operational within a short time.

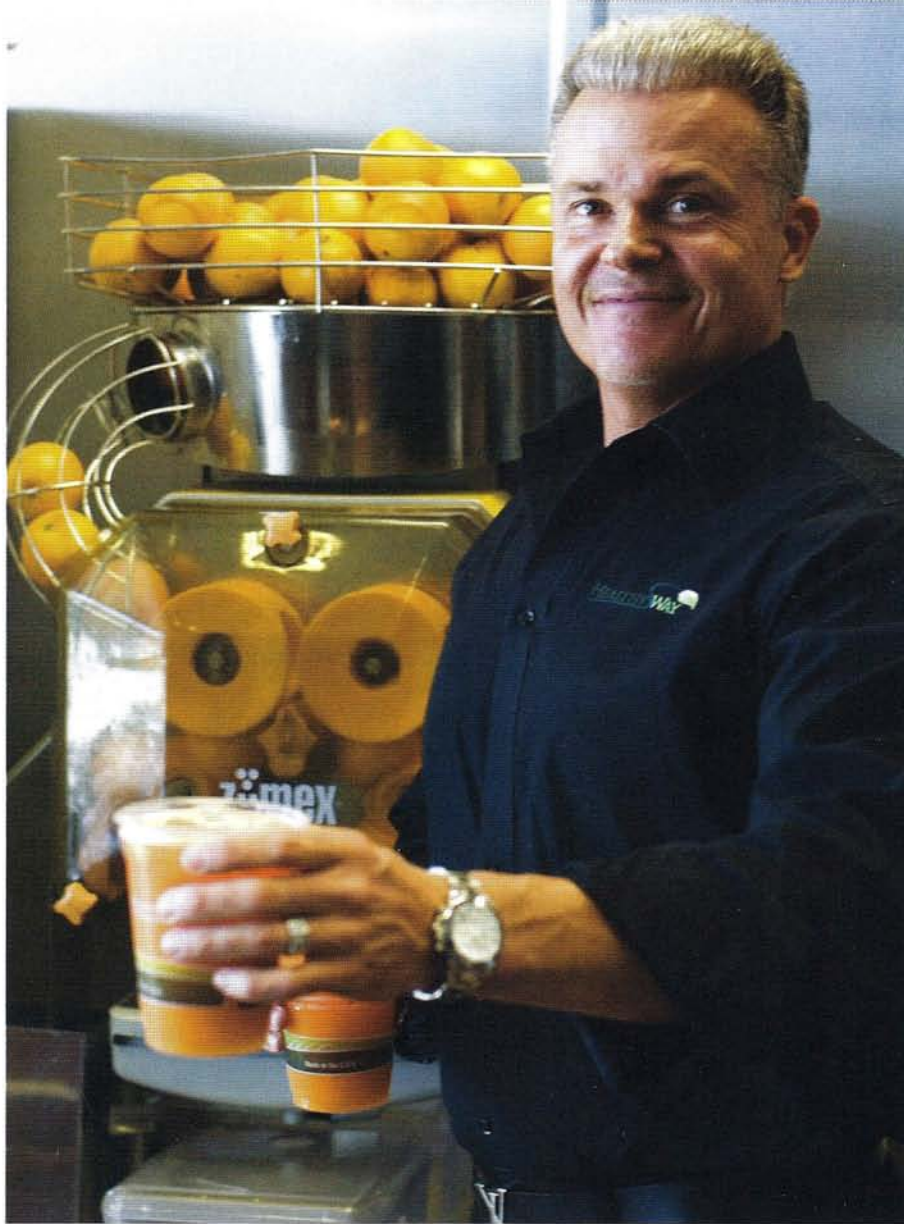
The HealthyWayClub.com site will offer a number of opportunities to engage visitors. For example, Johnnigan plans to host a "Food for Life Challenge" that will allow HealthyWayClub.com members to upload before and after photos of themselves to show the results of their new eating habits over time. Other users will be able to vote for the winner, who will get a cool \$10,000. In addition, the winner will win a spokesperson advertising contract with HealthyWay Café, plus prizes and gifts from the restaurant's affiliates.

"I envision the contest winner do for us what Jared did for Subway. And it's not just about weight," Johnnigan says. "The winner should be the person who made the biggest changes to achieve a healthier lifestyle."

Johnnigan also plans to build live chat capabilities to the site. It's all part of his mission to help people get healthier.

In addition to HealthyWayClub.com, Johnnigan has a Web site, HealthyWay.net, where customers can purchase his customized line of supplements.





their parents purchase entrees, Johnnigan has decided to venture into schools.

He has signed a contract to serve HealthyWay Café cuisine at Bolles School. Agreements for Providence School of Jacksonville and the Abess boulevard location of The Cambridge Prep School are also in the works.

One of his goals in providing food to the school is to study the effect healthy eating has on children. He plans to evaluate 100 students by measuring their weight and assessing their knowledge of nutrition. At the end of the year, he plans to reevaluate the same students and study any differences in their weight, knowledge, and even grades. He hopes to find that improvement in a child's diet can translate to improvement in their health and academic performance.

"For us, it's more than simply providing healthy menu items; we want to educate consumers about nutrition and ultimately make a difference. It's about empowerment," Johnnigan says. "People acquire tastes and many habits when they're children; we have to start nutrition education and smart eating habits with kids while they're young."

Johnnigan has raised his children to eat vegetables, fruits, and fish. He says that they have acquired a taste for healthy food and don't care for fatty or fried foods.

"My family inspires me. I want to leave this legacy for them — something that truly made a difference," he says.

## Leveraging technology

Johnnigan cites the Internet as one the most powerful tools to create buzz. "A big key for us was e-marketing. We developed

a social network, online videos, and Web sites to get the word out about the restaurant," Johnnigan says. "You can't beat the price point for marketing on the Web."

In addition to the restaurant's main Web site at [HealthyWayCafe.com](http://HealthyWayCafe.com), Johnnigan developed

training stores for new franchisees. The stores will be located in South Florida, California, Arizona, New York, Texas, and Colorado, to name a few.

"We wanted to target high-end cities with health-conscious populations," he said. "I've already invested \$2 million into the HealthyWay Café concept, including branding, formulas, Web presences, and more. Franchisees have a winning formula to replicate. The hard part is over. The interest in franchising has been tremendous."

Expansion has also meant savings for Johnnigan.

"Since we're growing, we have better buying power," he says. "We're actually preparing to do a price cut on our products to benefit our customers and their families. While the price will be lower, the quality will stay superior."

Children are very important to Johnnigan and his mission. Besides offering free meals for kids when

## 5 ACHIEVEMENT TRUTHS

Johnnigan says his success can be attributed to five simple "achievement truths." They are:

1. Always be honest.
2. Your name is everything. Guard it.
3. Treat people the way you want to be treated.
4. Never take "no" for an answer.
5. Nothing is impossible.





HealthyWay.net to showcase his supplement offerings and HealthyWayClub.com, an online community.

"I have always been into health and fitness," Johnnigan says. "I always wished there was a place where I could get healthy, high-quality food conveniently, and at a reasonable price. The HealthyWay Café brand fills that need and more."

"Food is fuel. You need good food to keep your body running in tip-top shape," Johnnigan says. "Food is essential to your performance."

### The customer is still always right

Customer service is paramount to HealthyWay Café's business model. When asked about his secret to success, Johnnigan always cites superior customer service.

"I want my customers to feel like they're family," Johnnigan says. "Every food product must be perfect — from the vegetables to the presentation. Word of mouth referrals are huge. People talk about what they love and what they hate. We want every customer's experience to be perfect. Happy customers can be ambassadors for your business."

Johnnigan has received a lot of positive feedback about his organic venture. One businessperson told Johnnigan he made it a point to visit HealthyWay Café when he flew into Jacksonville for work. Another customer came in to grab dinner for his sick wife. The woman told her husband that food from HealthyWay Café would be the only thing to make her feel better.

"It makes me feel good," Johnnigan says. "And it's motivation to continue to innovate and reach for new goals."

Even Johnnigan's employees are benefiting from HealthyWay Café. All of them have lost weight since working for Johnnigan and have increased their nutrition savvy.

"If that's not a testimonial, I don't know what is," Johnnigan says. **A**

Johnnigan can be reached at [Michael@healthyway.com](mailto:Michael@healthyway.com) or 904-735-7515.

Ashley Cisneros is a contributing editor of Advantage.  
She can be reached at [AshleyCisneros@gmail.com](mailto:AshleyCisneros@gmail.com).

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