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Best You Best Me: From Refugee to Private Jet Charter CEO, Leesburg Man Wants to Give Back

In Business, Community, Environment

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1 comment



When you see someone along the side of a road, picking up trash or hauling out discarded tires, you never really know why they are there – or what kind of spiritual journey they are on.



Joseph Dill

PROFILE

You might think they are business owners or service club members on an adopt-the-highway outing, or they could be someone performing court-appointed community service.

Whatever you might think, chances are you would never figure out it was Richard Zaher, CEO of Paramount Business Jets, or his explanation for why he was out along Old Mill Road during an early November snowstorm.

"I woke up that morning and I said, 'I am just not going to let my mind stop me,'" Zaher said. "I rented a truck and ended up cleaning up 540 pounds of trash, eight tires, a TV and 12 bags of cups and bottles."



PHOTO BY KEN DWORKIN

Nathan Hartman, Alexander Zaher, Leonardo Zaher AND Dean Morrad "helped a ton."

Zaher's roadside excursion was part of his spiritual journey – his attempt to pass on some of his blessings. That journey – that quest – also involved the establishment of a non-profit organization called Best You Best Me. On one of his ditch-cleaning jaunts, Zaher used a tow rope and his Mercedes G Wagon to help a cable TV installer who got stuck on that road. Then, he went to the house where the man was installing cable and presented him a check for \$250.

But wait. All of that is the “who” and “why” at the end of this story. Let’s go back to the spiritual journey and where it began.

Fleeing Afghanistan

In 1980, 5-year-old Richard Zaher is fleeing with his family from Russian troops who invaded Afghanistan.

“We left everything,” Zaher said. “The freedom fighters took us out as there were jets flying by. We hid in the caves and went from night to night to cave hotels. We finally made it to India, and we thought we would be there three to four months. It ended up taking five years to get a visa.”

Zaher said his mother had worked for a radio station in Afghanistan and in India, and she was waiting to get a visa to the United States where she would have a job with Voice of America.

“After five years, it came down to one meeting and one question,” Zaher said. “We were at the embassy, and the gentleman said, ‘You already have been given a visa to go to Canada. Why do you want to come to America instead?’

“My mother said, ‘If I go to Canada, I will still be a refugee, but if I go to America, I will have a job with Voice of America and I can support my family.’ A voice came from the dark (out of sight) and said, ‘Give it to her.’ He was the man in charge.”

With immigration issues resolved, Zaher and his family settled in Northern Virginia, where he attended schools in Herndon and Leesburg.

He attended Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida, founding Paramount Business Jets in New York City in 2005 before moving back to Leesburg. The global private jet company was ranked in Inc. Magazine’s 500 fastest-growing private jet companies in 2013 and 2014 and was No. 2,550 on the Inc. 5,000 fastest-growing list in 2018.

"I completed my aerospace studies and went into business for myself," Zaher said. "Our primary service is we provide private jet charters anywhere in the world."

Best You Best Me

What started with one man's road clean-up project has grown into a non-profit agency with sweeping and wide-ranging goals.

"I started a non-profit to give back," Zaher said. "Best You Best Me is based on the philosophy that we are one. We alleviate suffering via acts of kindness."

Zaher's family joined him on his clean-up runs, then another dozen or so neighbors and friends came to help. On Dec. 20, about 20 volunteers gathered for a group picture on the road to mark a milestone.



"Our goal was to collect one ton and we ended up exceeding it by 600 pounds," Zaher said. "I hope we can persuade or inspire others to go out there and clean up their neighborhood or county. We can make a big difference."

The goal of Best You Best Me is to expand on the clean-up efforts and find other ways of helping others who are having difficulties.

"In 2019, BYBM would like to cover the expenses of the next 10 clean-ups to make the experience accessible to all," Zaher said. "If anyone wants to clean up their neighborhood or (anywhere in) the county, we ask that you contact info@bestyoubestme.org."

In addition, Zaher hopes to set up a road rescue volunteer network in Loudoun County, targeting seniors and pregnant women, especially. The number is 877-778-1788, if you need help or want to volunteer to help. The BYBM Facebook page is facebook.com/bestyoubestme.

"I just want to give back," Zaher. "It wasn't always easy, but now a lot of great things have been happening to me. We all have these ideas, but we put them off because we are busy with our lives. There are a lot of people in the community who want to help, but they are waiting for someone else or they are waiting until they find the time. That is the idea of Best You Best Me."