

# minnesota BUSINESS

INSPIRATION FOR GROWING COMPANIES

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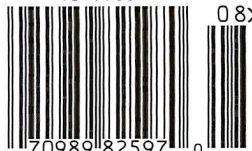
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SPECIAL REPORT: **TRANSPORTATION**



**THE NETWORKER**



**Thirsty for growth:**  
Paul Dzubnar is  
ready to expand his  
restaurant activities  
even more

**BIZ BRIEFING**

**GREEN MILL  
RESTAURANTS,  
LLC**

**Headquarters:**  
St. Paul

**Inception:**  
1975

**Leadership:**  
Paul Dzubnar

**Employees:**  
2,000-plus

**Revenue:**  
\$60 million

**Description:**  
Full-service casual  
dining restaurants in  
four states

**Web:**  
[greenmill.com](http://greenmill.com)

# Partnering smarts

Playing well with others has helped Paul Dzubnar thrive in the restaurant business **BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER**

If you spend any time in the Twin Cities, you're probably familiar with one of the following: Green Mill Restaurants, Crooked Pint Ale House, and Town Hall Brewery. The man behind all three (and more) is Paul Dzubnar.

Dzubnar is a force to be reckoned with in the restaurant business, despite having been in it for just 11 years. His secret? Playing well with others. Dzubnar is a living, breathing example of how to put strategic

partnerships into action. In creating alliances, he leverages his partners' strengths to both parties' benefit.

Prior to joining the restaurant business, Dzubnar graduated from the United States Air Force Academy and served as an officer in the Air Force for almost six years, leaving as a captain.

His start in the industry began on a sailing trip with the founder of St. Paul-based Green Mill Restaurants, who offered him a job as a district

manager. His first assignment? Learn the business during a new store opening by serving as a bartender, pizza cook, and delivery dispatcher, among other roles. From that experience, Dzubnar gained enough ammo to be dangerous and hit the road visiting restaurants in his district, making improvements along the way.

In 2004, Dzubnar was promoted to vice president and became a minority shareholder in Green Mill



Restaurants. That same year, he formed an investment group with three other individuals and became a Green Mill franchisee. To get equity, he secured a second mortgage on his house.

Finding a spot in a Lakeville strip mall previously occupied by a Napa Auto Parts, Dzubnar worked with the landlord to secure a lease that was below market value. "It took a lot of convincing to get the landlord to take a chance on a bunch of guys with no balance sheet and no personal financial statements," he recalls.

He also had to get approval from Green Mill Restaurants to be both its vice president and a franchisee. Not only did he receive that approval, but in 2007 Dzubnar was promoted to president of the company, where he also became a partner.

By 2008, Dzubnar had finished acquiring ownership in his sixth Green Mill franchise and had become the brand's largest franchisee, while continuing to serve as the company president. "It was a lot to juggle, but I enjoyed the challenges and the experience I received as a franchisee, as it helped me see things from a different perspective," he says.

Over the next two years Dzubnar also contributed to new concepts and openings, including Twisted Fork Grille in St. Paul. The restaurant was formerly a Green Mill Café, but "in analyzing our sales per square foot, we realized that we were not maximizing this real estate that we owned." Twisted Fork Grille opened in the summer of 2010, and Dzubnar is now looking to expand the space due to customer demand.

That same summer, Dzubnar negotiated a purchase of Green Mill Restaurants from the founder and owner. As the current owner, he oversees dozens of Green Mill locations throughout the region, including in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North Dakota.

Dzubnar's primary partner is Mike Drummer, who was one of the main Green Mill owners when Dzubnar was opening a location in 2005. Their partnership has led to a variety of business



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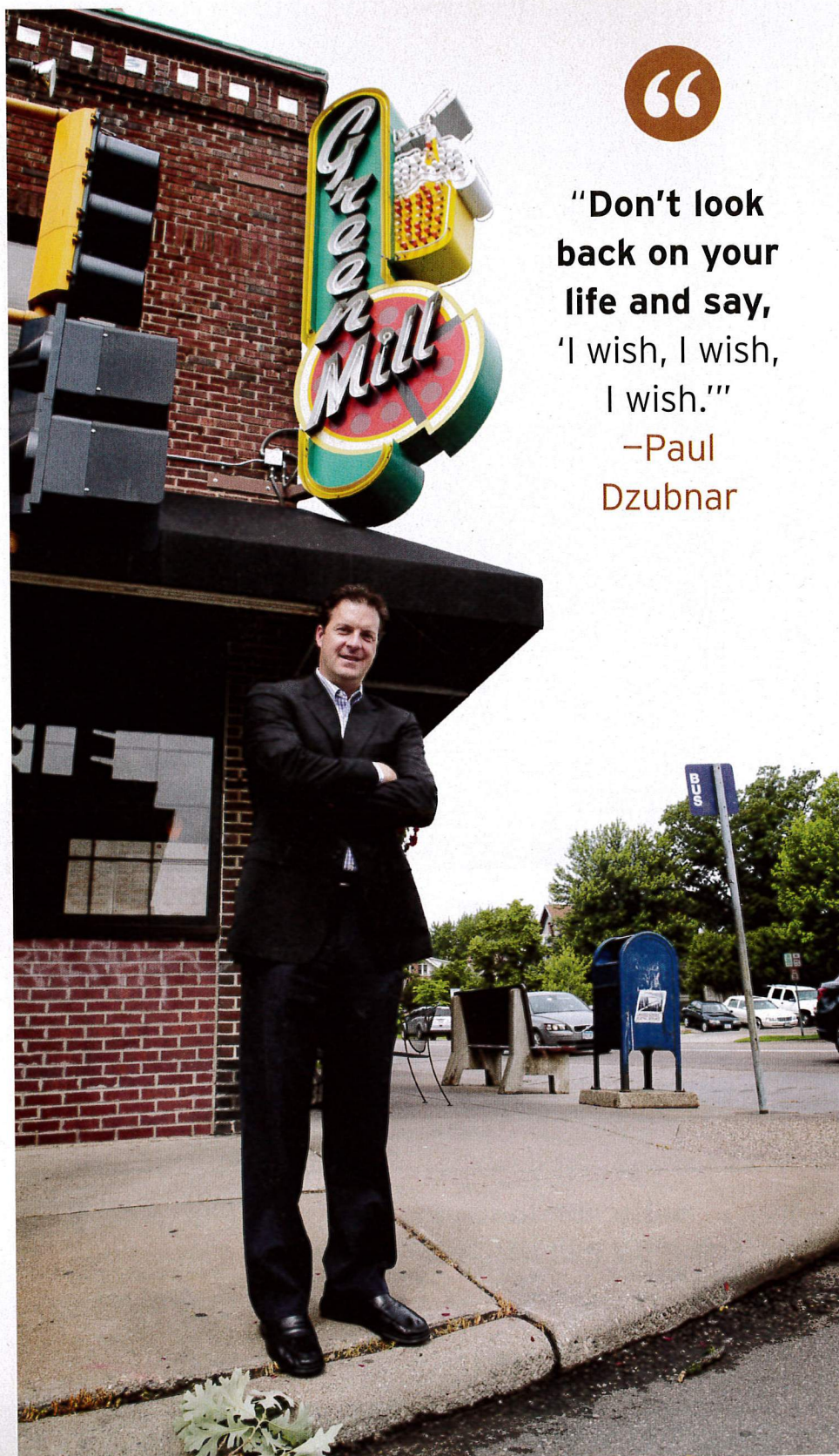
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**THE NETWORKER**



“

**“Don’t look  
back on your  
life and say,  
‘I wish, I wish,  
I wish.’”**

**—Paul  
Dzubnar**

purchases and real estate investments. “We hit it off immediately,” Dzubnar says.

In June 2010, Dzubnar and Drummer partnered with Pete Rifakes, the founder of Town Hall Brewery at the Seven Corners intersection of Minneapolis. Town Hall Tap followed, and next up is Town Hall Lanes, a bowling alley in the Lake Nokomis area.

In 2011, Dzubnar and company launched the Crooked Pint Ale House concept (think nouveau urban pub) in Minneapolis to expand its brand portfolio. “This gave us another concept we could own, operate, and franchise, capitalizing on our existing infrastructure and understanding of the franchise business,” says Dzubnar.

Disclaimer: I myself am now in business with Dzubnar. At the time of my initial interview with him for this piece, I was evaluating potential partners to take over the management of two of my businesses: Galaxy Drive-In in St. Louis Park and Green Acres, an event center I created in a renovated historic barn in Eden Prairie. Dzubnar fit the bill nicely.

With a family and three young children, how does Dzubnar juggle his personal life and stay on top of business? His motto in life is quality, not quantity. “The time that our family spends together is real quality time, where we focus on each other, and that goes a long way,” he says.

For aspiring entrepreneurs, Dzubnar advises, “Be willing to take calculated and informed risks. Don’t look back on your life and say, ‘I wish, I wish, I wish.’ I have failed a number of times, but each time I have learned from them.”

When asked about bigger-picture goals, Dzubnar says he wants to “continue to build a professional restaurant company with many different concepts in different segments. We just love food and people, so the sky is the limit.” ■



**STEVEN SCHUSSLER** is CEO of Schussler Creative, the founder of the Rainforest Café, and the author of *It’s a Jungle in There: Inspiring Lessons, Hard-Won Insights, and Other Acts of Entrepreneurial Daring*.