

# New online high school to offer a second chance to dropouts

BY BRIAN BANDELL

Three South Florida entrepreneurs are launching an online high school they hope will offer a second chance to adults and recent dropouts.

Based in Pensacola, Smart Horizons Career Online Education plans to launch in May, offering a high school degree program for \$990. That's much less than most online high school programs.

Howard A. Liebman, Evan Goldman and Brent Goldman founded the nation's first online college preparatory high school, University of Miami Online High School, in 2003. The Washington Post Co. acquired it two years later.

With their non-compete agreements expired, the trio is building a new version of the industry they started. While UMOHS catered to athletes and entertainers with a \$10,000 annual tuition, Smart Horizons is looking for working adults, those who recently dropped out of high school and young prison inmates.

Liebman said there are 40 million high school dropouts and 3.5 million juvenile prisoners nationwide. He'd like to use federal funds to support their degrees, but has not applied yet.

"Part of the reason they drop out isn't because they didn't understand content," he said. "They dropped out because the content wasn't engaging and they couldn't manage their time."

Liebman said Smart Horizons would address that by making coursework that applies to their desired careers, and offering it online so students can work at their own pace. There are six high school majors to choose from, including health care, education, homeland security and office management. The school

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plans to offer credentialed certificates in those areas – something that other online high schools don't do, Liebman said.

The courses are computer programs with multimedia presentations, not live interactions with instructors. Students can call a help center if they need assistance.

This model will make it more affordable.

In the past, the completion rate at online high schools has been about 85 percent, Liebman said. At Smart Horizons, his goal is 90 percent.

Smart Horizons has applied with AdvanceEd for certification as a school district. If it is approved, it could open high schools nationwide. Liebman said the goal is to open four to six schools a year.

They want multiple schools so they can create programs in partnership with other organizations, Evan Goldman said. That could include Boys & Girls Clubs and school districts, he said.

"High school dropouts have a higher IQ than you might think," Goldman said. "Life just got in the way."

His brother, Brent Goldman, is president of the Sagemont School in Weston.

Liebman said he'd like to have 100,000 students at Smart Horizons in three years. The company is in Pensacola, rather than South Florida, because he found a technology company to partner with there. It has 15 employees and plans to hire 10 to 15 more by the time the school opens, he said.



Liebman



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# Sonic to blast off in Fort Lauderdale

BY OSCAR PEDRO MUSIBAY

The Gallery at Beach Place will serve as a testing ground for a Sonic eatery that could be open 24/7, has indoor seating and – for the first time for the 3,500-store chain – sells alcohol.

Wine, beer and liquor will be offered at the 5,600-square-foot space at 17 S. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd.

The 20-year lease with options is valued at more than \$5 million.

Cushman & Wakefield retail brokerage services professionals Jeff Evans and Greg Masin represented Sonic in its site search and in lease negotiations with the property's owner, Thor Equities.

Evans, an associate at Cushman & Wakefield in Fort Lauderdale and Miami, said the brokerage had to convince Sonic corporate that alcohol made sense.

"The majority of the people dining at Beach Place and establishments on A1A have an alcohol component," he said.

He said the Sonic franchisee that did the

deal is looking at other South Florida locations that may or may not serve alcohol. Drive-through locations will not serve alcohol.

The Gallery at Beach Place is a three-level entertainment and shopping complex with mid-size retailers including Sunglass Hut and Nature Basics. The restaurants include Hooters, Lu Lu's Bait Shack and Fat Tuesday, which serve alcohol and are sometimes open until 4 a.m.

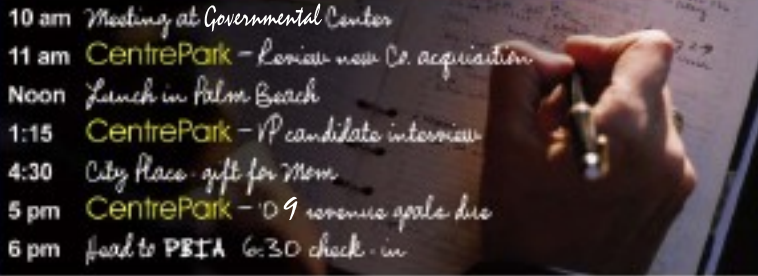
The latter is important because Sonic is going to feel out whether being open 24/7 makes sense, Evans said.

Sonic also will have a kiosk on the ground floor that will allow the public to order and then either wait for the food to be brought down or go up to the second floor to get it.

"Fort Lauderdale beach has become a year-round destination, and this new lease gives Sonic the ability to capture the immense foot traffic from both tourists and residents," Evans said.

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