

Seven to Watch
SHAPING OUR REGION IN 2007

JAMES WOLF
WWW.LAZYDAY.COM



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James Wolf has helped change nightlife in Charlotte by organizing bar crawls through Lazyday.com, and the idea has been franchised to other cities.

He's given the night new life with Web site

BY MICHELLE CROUCH
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James Wolf is king of the bar crawl. The 32-year-old Charlotte resident has helped organize more than 80 of them since 2001, from costumed carvots on Halloween to a celebrity crawl where everyone dresses as a Hollywood star. Bar owners and uptown boosters say Wolf's events - promoted through a Web site he operates with two friends - have infused the city's nightlife with new energy.

The site, www.lazyday.com, now gets about 4 million page views a month. More than 16,000 people subscribe to its weekly event e-mail, and hundreds participate in the bar crawls.

This month, for example, 420 people - most dressed like Santa Claus - participated in Lazyday's Santa's Uptown Bar Crawl.

His background

Wolf, who writes software for credit unions by day, moved to Charlotte in December 2001. He hooked up with two old friends - Scott Valentine and Tom Zenge - who had launched Lazyday.com as part of a plan to sell a nightlife coupon book.

To help promote the site, they took digital pictures at uptown bars and handed out cards with the Web address.

When Wolf got to town, he saw the pictures' potential as a marketing tool. He revamped the Web site, making space to post hundreds of pictures, plus comments, instead of just five pictures.

As the site's popularity increased, the trio dumped the coupon book idea and started bar crawls.

Why he'll make news

Traffic to Lazyday.com is growing, as is the number of people participating in events. The company now charges establishments to advertise drink specials and other events on the site, and it already has two corporate sponsors: Budweiser and Southern Comfort. Lazyday also recently became a franchise, with sister sites in Nashville, Tenn., and Wilmington.

What are his challenges?

Some Lazyday fans are getting tired of bar crawls, so Wolf is trying to think of more original events. "When you've done anything 80 times," he says, "it's just not as fun anymore."

Vital Stats

Age: 32.

Family: Single

Time in Charlotte: Attended UNC Charlotte for a few years in the 1990s; moved here from Chicago in 2001.

Early Impressions: "People aren't as cutthroat here, and the weather is great."

Deepest desire: "That someday all the people who work hard for Lazy Day can live off the money they make doing it."

Keeps him awake at night: "I always worry that someone will get hurt on a bar crawl. We live in such a litigious society, I'm afraid that would wreck it all."

The Seven So Far

- Monday:** The Rev. Claude Alexander
- Tuesday:** Rocky Paiano of CATS
- Wednesday:** Mary Thomsen, building-industry leader
- Today:** James Wolf, bar crawl organizer
- Coming Friday:** He's changing the way we house the poor.

What's his strategy?

Wolf and his colleagues are doing more events tied to sports teams such as the Checkers and the Bobcats. They've also created a marketing plan and they're working to attract more sponsors. The company expects to break \$100,000 in advertising revenues for the first time next year, he says, "which is why we all still have other jobs."

"People think we just party all the time," he says. "We get our share of free Budweisers, but really we're trying to run a business."

What people say about him

Lazyday has "added a new dimension to Charlotte nightlife," says Jason Astephen, manager at Buckhead Saloon. "James is more involved than owners of other Web sites. He's at every event, constantly promoting it and in everybody's face."

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