Business Monday

# Tropical Treasure Hunt Company grows with new adventures, storefront

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Daily News photo by LORI ABBOTTS

Owners Angela Beall, left, and Anthony Schultz examine a treasure hunt clue with pirates Pamela New-Ethridge and Euell Nielsen on Saturday during the grand opening of Tropical Treasure Hunt Company's new location in The Plaza, across from Havensight Mall on St. Thomas.

Romance wasn't all that blossomed for Anthony Schultz and Angela Beall back in 2017. What started as a romantic, fun adventure for his girlfriend's birthday has turned into a full-blown successful business, the Tropical Treasure Hunt Company. With a host of new adventures waiting to be explored and a new augmented reality system, Tropical Treasure Hunt opened its new storefront Saturday with a grand opening complete with pirates.

The idea was simple. Using the old-fashioned treasure hunt idea, Schultz hid 10 clues all over the island at places they had enjoyed together, leading to the ultimate treasure, a surprise party and a photo album. It didn't take long for the idea to gain interest, and the couple realized this could become a fun new island attraction for both tourists and locals. They opened Tropical Treasure Hunt Company less than a year later from their home.

What started as a little side business has since turned into full-time work for Schultz, and although Beall is still pursuing her career, she is an integral part of the business and continues to work with him to create personalized treasure hunts.

"He has the grand ideas," said Beall. "I try to lay that groundwork of how to get there, so it's a good balance."

Schultz and Beall thought their product would primarily attract the romantic, but the market soon grew to include events for children and adults, schools and corporate team building for companies such as WTJX, Tunnick Insurance and FirstBank. No two treasure hunts are alike. They are customized to the individual person or group.

"This is a very hands-on business. We are involved in every part because quality is paramount to us. There are shortcuts that we could take that would cost less money and time, but we just don't do it because it just doesn't look the same or feel the same. Having that high quality, individualized service is really important. Every little detail matters," said Beall.

At first, Tropical Treasure Hunt offered one package, a three-hour Golden Age of Piracy adventure. Since then, they have added Operation Tropical Mindfall with a spy theme, a Magic Portal adventure for children that incorporates both pirates and magic and a night kayak adventure with V.I. EcoTours. They also recently added a Salty Pirate boat adventure, partnering with Seahorse Water Taxi for a full day adventure on the water, including a stop on St. John. A time travel treasure hunt is coming soon.

Schultz believes in local businesses supporting each other, so many of the clues are found at local bars, restaurants, the Pirate's Museum and other local attractions before ending at the beach (which beach is a secret). For the treasure inside the chest, they work with local retailers so the customer can pre-purchase a treasure to surprise their loved one.

By 2019, the company started getting more attention from cruise ship passengers who found them online. The hunt allows them to visit multiple areas on the island while on their quest. By 2020, Tropical Treasure Hunt received a TripAdvisor's Traveler's Choice award. They also do treasure hunts at The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas twice a week for their guests and now have four part time/contract workers on staff, including a pirate or two.

The company made it through hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, but it was COVID-19 that really forced them to think outside the box.

"When COVID hit, all the attractions we bring them to were closed. Are we just going to sit back and hope they reopen and rely on them? No, we need to invest in some things. We invested in augmented reality and it changed the game, because now we didn't need the attractions. It's really high quality, like that Pokeymon Go that got really popular," said Schultz.

The program on the provided iPad acts as a GPS, so they can customize where participants go and when a clue activates.

"They'll see, for example, a safe. It's not there, but they'll see it on the iPad and they'll interact with it," Schultz said. "With augmented reality, we can track them and where they are with the clues, and we have walkie talkies to keep us in touch in real time if at some time phone service doesn't work."

The augmented reality also allows them to offer lower priced self-guided tours, making it more attractive for locals.

As the business grew, so did the need for space. Working out of their condo, Schultz and Beall dedicated a cabinet for the business' supplies. It soon filled a closet and started spilling out from there. It was time to find a small space outside the home to continue operating the business.

Tropical Treasure Hunt Company opened a 200-square-foot space in The Plaza across from Havensight Mall on Saturday, a convenient spot to stop in and book an adventure for both cruise ship passengers and locals. Visitors enjoyed a rum tasting by neighboring Leatherback Brewing Company, live music and a photo booth by Island Snaps VI.

For more information call **786-296-8800** or visits www.tropicaltreasurehunt.com.

