



## EXTREME SANDBOX APPEARS ON HIT ABC-TV SHOW SHARK TANK

*Hastings-based company secures \$150,000 from show's investors to open Texas location in spring 2016*

Extreme Sandbox founder and CEO Randy Stenger started a business from scratch, took on city zoning ordinances and grew his company to more than \$1 million in sales in just three years. But none of that was as exciting as standing across from the Sharks—the investors who evaluated his business model on ABC-TV's hit show Shark Tank.

"I was jumping up and down!" said Stenger of his appearance on the show, which aired in early January 2016.

Two of the Shark Tank investors were so impressed with the unique angle of Stenger's business that they agreed to invest a total of \$150,000 to expand the business.

At Extreme Sandbox, customers can play on the heavy equipment that you'd see at the average construction site, including bulldozers, excavators and even fire engines. The idea sounds expensive, but Stenger was able to creatively pilot his business plan in 2012 by leasing everything he needed: all of the equipment, a construction trailer and 10 acres of land near Hastings.

Extreme Sandbox quickly outgrew those modest accommodations. Stenger had a vision for a 6,000 sq. ft. office and meeting and event center that could attract larger groups. The problem was, he didn't know how to finance it and he didn't have time to figure it out on his own. That's when the City of Hastings planning and economic development department recommended he contact Open to Business.

"The first time I met with Randy, he was extremely busy with the business and had the idea, but just didn't quite have the time and motivation to move forward," said Open to Business Advisor Laurie Crow. "He came to me to help light a fire under him."

Crow and Stenger worked together to develop a financing plan to purchase the land he was already operating on and to build the new facility. After being turned down by several banks, Merchants Bank agreed to a \$500,000 loan. At the last minute, however, the appraisal came back \$30,000 short of the cost to build. Open to Business's parent

organization, the Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers (MCCD), was able to step in and provide a gap loan to complete the deal and make Stenger's vision a reality.

"It was such a rollercoaster of a process," Stenger said. "Ultimately, [Open to Business] came in to help."

Extreme Sandbox's meeting and event center opened in 2014. Securing the loan to build the new facility gave Extreme Sandbox the ability to host corporate team-building events for up to 100 people as well as providing room to store equipment during the harsh Minnesota winters. Dakota County Commissioner and Community Development Agency (CDA) Board Chair Mike Slavik, who represents the Hastings area, said that Extreme Sandbox's success is one of the many success stories from the Open to Business program in his county. "This business demonstrates a strong partnership between the CDA, local cities, and MCCD," he said. "I'm thrilled that Extreme Sandbox has been able to take their concept to the national stage and congratulate Randy and his entire team on their continued growth," he said.

With the additional investment from the Shark Tank investors, Stenger's plans to open a second location in Texas this spring are on solid ground. Open to Business's help with the expansion of the Minnesota location will allow the Extreme Sandbox team to centrally locate business operations and a call center in Minnesota while the business grows across the country. Stenger said that working with Open to Business gave him the practice he needed to take these next steps.

"I think ultimately I've learned to be able to tell the story and have a clear vision of where I'm going...You have to be able to visualize the future, tell people what that vision is, and give accurate estimates," he said. "We have a very unusual concept, but I think I was pretty clear in selling the vision. The bank and everyone was able to take a risk. The funding is out there, and they want to help small businesses."

To learn more about Extreme Sandbox, visit [www.extremesandbox.com](http://www.extremesandbox.com).