

# 2021 SUCCESS STORY

WILLISTON



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## SAFARI TRAMPOLINE PARK

WILLISTON -- You could say Jawaid Surani was born to be an entrepreneur. The 44-year-old started his first business when he was just a teenager. There have been many since then.

"I have been doing my own businesses since I was 15 or 16 years old. I have never worked for somebody else," Surani said. "I have to try and see if I am able to do that, you know?"

Surani's curiosity has certainly contributed to his success as an entrepreneur. Since he and his family moved to Williston eight years ago from Virginia, he has owned all types of businesses, including a convenience store, check cashing business and laundry mat. His most recent endeavor is Safari Trampoline Park. The sprawling indoor playland offers an assortment of trampolines, arcade games, bumper cars, VR games and a restaurant. Surani got the idea from his young children.

"I moved here almost eight years ago and there was hardly anything for kids to do," he said. "I used to take them at least twice a year to Fargo, because Minot and Bismarck didn't have trampoline parks (at that time). The first thing on their list was to go to the trampoline park. If we stayed three days, they went every day."

One of the first steps Surani took toward building the park was meeting with Keith Olson, Regional Director of the North Dakota Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) in Williston. Olson helped Surani gain confidence in his plan.

"I didn't think I could build this," Surani said. "I started believing after I had a meeting with Keith. My credit is good. I had a business plan in my head. But I did not know how to put it on paper. Keith helped me with everything."

Olson suggested Surani utilize the Bank of North Dakota/Williston STAR Fund Flex PACE Interest Buydown program to help lower the interest on his construction loan. BND provides a roughly 2:1 match to the STAR Fund's contribution. The Williston City Commission approved up to \$108,000 for Safari Trampoline Park.

"We know the cost of doing business is higher and timelines are longer to get a project up and going in our region," said Olson. "The Flex PACE helps a startup by taking some pressure off of the cash flow. It also helps the lender share the risk with the BND so that we can develop these quality of life projects in our community."

Safari Trampoline Park celebrated its grand opening on March 4, 2019. About one year later, the park was shut down for two months due to COVID-19. Despite the pandemic, Surani has remained grateful. "COVID gave us perspective. If it was pre-COVID, I might be complaining, oh, business is a little slow. But now I am thanking God," he said. "I am just lucky. Because there are more intelligent people and more hard-working people out there than me."

As Surani watches his business rebound,





he is optimistic about the future.

“Every week I have kids coming in and their faces light up and I just want to give them a \$50 arcade card and people are restraining me, you know,” he jokes. “I think the next year or two will be amazing. Maybe next five years will be amazing.”

Surani and his wife Diana have three young boys who can often be found at the trampoline park.

