

Cameron McMahan takes a 4-year-old on a "high flight," which is when an instructor takes a customer toward the top of the 52-foot-tall flight chamber.





# iFLY

*where  
everybody gets  
a chance to soar*

BY Esther Keane

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Robert Pizzini, center, is the CEO of iFly Virginia Beach, which draws individuals, top, and groups, bottom, of all ages. (Photos courtesy of iFly)



Photo courtesy of iFly



Photo by Harry Gerwien

**T**he best way to conquer fear is to confront it.

This was Torrey Breeden's intention the first time he jumped out of a plane. Instead of living with his fear of heights, he faced it head on.

"You end up confronting your internal hurdles," Breeden said. "Either you are going to do it or you're going to quit."

The executive vice president of The Breeden Company and president of Lynnhaven Homes, the company's residential division, experienced a moment of triumph, which then turned into his passion and hobby.

The sense of freedom and the rush of adrenaline are appealing, but not many people are willing to throw themselves out of a plane 12,000 feet above the ground – and they don't have to. In his journey to become better at skydiving, Breeden visited indoor wind tunnels around the country. During a trip to Denver, he saw people of all ages who wanted to fly and decided Virginia Beach would be an ideal place to open his own tunnel.

"It doesn't take skill for most people," he said. "They want to get in there and see what it feels like, so we started making a plan."

Since its opening 16 months ago, iFly Virginia Beach has taken possibility to new heights. In 2015, the facility had over 32,000 customers, with 17 percent of them tourists, the vast majority locals. The venue includes a wind tunnel, parking garage and apartment complex.

It didn't happen overnight. The operation took five years to complete and faced challenges in location, development and con-

struction. After overcoming each obstacle, iFly is now a top entertainment and training facility in Hampton Roads.

Robert Pizzini, who retired from the U.S. Navy in 2010 after 26 years of service, is the chief executive officer in charge of running the day-to-day operations. Having carefully picked the managers and flight instructors, Pizzini is confident that when people come to iFly, they receive the best experience and coaching.

Ray Kubiak, chief flight instructor with over 20 years of flight experience, works with 14 other instructors to provide flight time to those who want to try it once, as well as to individuals seeking to improve their skills. With 91 people involved in a membership program, coaching is a large part of what iFly does, but the two most popular packages are for couples and families.

"We are very family-oriented," Pizzini said. In 2015, 11- and 12-year-olds were iFly's highest demographic, but the age range spanned from 3 years old to 94. People with various disabilities also fly.

At iFly, everyone gets a chance to soar.

"We appeal to someone in a tank top and flip flops as much as corporate business members," Breeden said. "To provide for the latter, we have a higher-end conference room available to businesses located on a different floor from the tunnel."

Those hesitant to fly often leave surprised at how easy it was and they're ready to go another time, Pizzini stated. Because of its success, iFly Virginia Beach has been authorized to open another franchise in Florida. – **IL**

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At top left, the staff of iFly form a human circle while flying high. Torrey Breeden, top right, brought the venue to Virginia Beach.