

The Spatz award winner's business success deeply rooted in CAP Entrepreneur

By Kristi Carr

E Capt. Nicholas Kalair goes to work in blue jeans and a T-shirt, driving a Jeep he's had for several years through the streets of Las Vegas. Delving deeper, however, reveals that, despite his tender 30 years, he owns three global companies and is a financial backer for those with good ideas. He will tell anyone, "I attribute at least 70 percent of my success to CAP."

Rewind


At 13, growing up in Michigan, Kalair joined Civil Air Patrol as a cadet because his cousin belonged and it seemed an interesting thing to do. In CAP, he benefited from "some of the greatest mentors," he said, including Maj. Gen. Amy S. Courter, CAP's national commander. "These CAP personnel were the most influential peo-

ple to me," he said, "and I still talk to them today.

"They taught me the social skills to be a leader — even goofy things like how to tie a tie and more important things like treating others with respect — 'yes, sir,' 'no, ma'am.'"

He also credits his CAP mentors for putting him into leadership positions. "I've been a cadet commander, a flight commander, a squadron commander. They kept saying to me, 'Nicholas, you need to get up here and do this.'"

Early on, he set his sights on the ultimate CAP cadet honor, the Gen. Carl A. Spatz Award, and achieved this goal in 1996, when he was



Combining business with pleasure, Nicholas Kalair, right, and a fellow master's program student, Dan Saenz, left South Africa to literally travel around the world; a stop in China took them not only to the Great Wall but also to Kalair's factory for one of his businesses, Bridge Cutters, which sells cutting equipment, software and supplies for sign-making. Photo courtesy of Jennifer Bishall

18, the youngest to earn the award at the time. He also earned the Frank G. Brewer National Aerospace Award. With the Spaatz award as leverage, still three more years of eligibility as a cadet and the backing of his CAP mentors, he went on to run all sorts of wingwide programs for CAP, teaching others how to be leaders.

“You actually learn the most,” he revealed, “when you’re teaching someone else.”

Real Time

Proving the adage that success begets success, Kalair received scholarships — either directly from CAP or through CAP-affiliated programs — that he used to finance an undergraduate degree in aviation from Western Michigan University. By 2000, at age 21, he was working full-time as a flight instructor and charter pilot.

It was then, while sitting at the kitchen table with his parents, that the subject of his future came up. “That was a Wednesday and I literally decided it was time to take a risk,” he said. By Friday, he was on his way to Las Vegas, carrying \$2,000 and a lot of ambition.

“I knew Michigan’s economy was floundering so I picked Vegas, where the economy was on the upswing,” he explained. When he arrived in Nevada, he used \$500 as

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— Capt. Nicholas Kalair, Michigan Wing

a down payment on a house under construction, with the intent it would be his residence. Then one day, while waiting for the house to be built, he picked up a local newspaper and read an article that caused him to see an opportunity to start his real estate business. With the down payment money, he bought more houses until, in 2004, he had built a real estate empire.

Meanwhile, Kalair found himself in demand by those seeking venture capital for their own projects. “People come out of the woodwork to seek you out,” he noted. He divested himself of most of his real estate, retaining just a few properties, and got into the business of hard money lending.

In one instance, he found himself a business partner in Kinetic Productions, which went on to garner two Emmys for its work in linking directors of different venues at the Olympics in Salt Lake City and Athens, Greece. As Courter recalled, “Nick once told me that everything he needed to know to run a video shoot he learned from being a cadet encampment commander!”

Ready to move on to another project, Kalair recently sold his share of the company back to his business partner.



Photo by Lt. Col. Carol Heeringa, Michigan Wing

At age 18 and with the Gen. Carl A. Spaatz Award under his belt, Kalair, right, then a cadet colonel, took on the job of cadet commander for the first time during a 1996 Michigan Wing encampment. He is pictured here with then-Cadet Lt. Col. Anthony Guaterez.

Fast Forward

“I have a lot of irons in the fire,” allowed Kalair, who now owns and manages a salon distribution company, Centerline Nails; a computer hardware-plotter and sign-making equipment company, Bridge Cutters; and his real estate holdings, Prestige Executive Suites-Kaey Holdings. He just finished a master’s degree in business administration at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He was one of 25 in the master’s program and the only one who actually owns a business, earning him the nickname “The Entrepreneur.”

Business has taken him to South Africa and numerous other countries, including Egypt, Dubai and China. But

despite his busy schedule, he maintains his involvement with CAP as a captain attached to the Michigan Wing’s Van Dyke Cadet Squadron, and he routinely flies his own Piper Navajo Twin.

“Now my goal is enjoying life and learning life’s meaning,” he said, “but I wouldn’t be a leader in three worldwide companies without the foundation and roots from CAP.” ▲

Two years into his association with Kinetic Productions, Kalair was working a camera during a film shoot in January 2004.

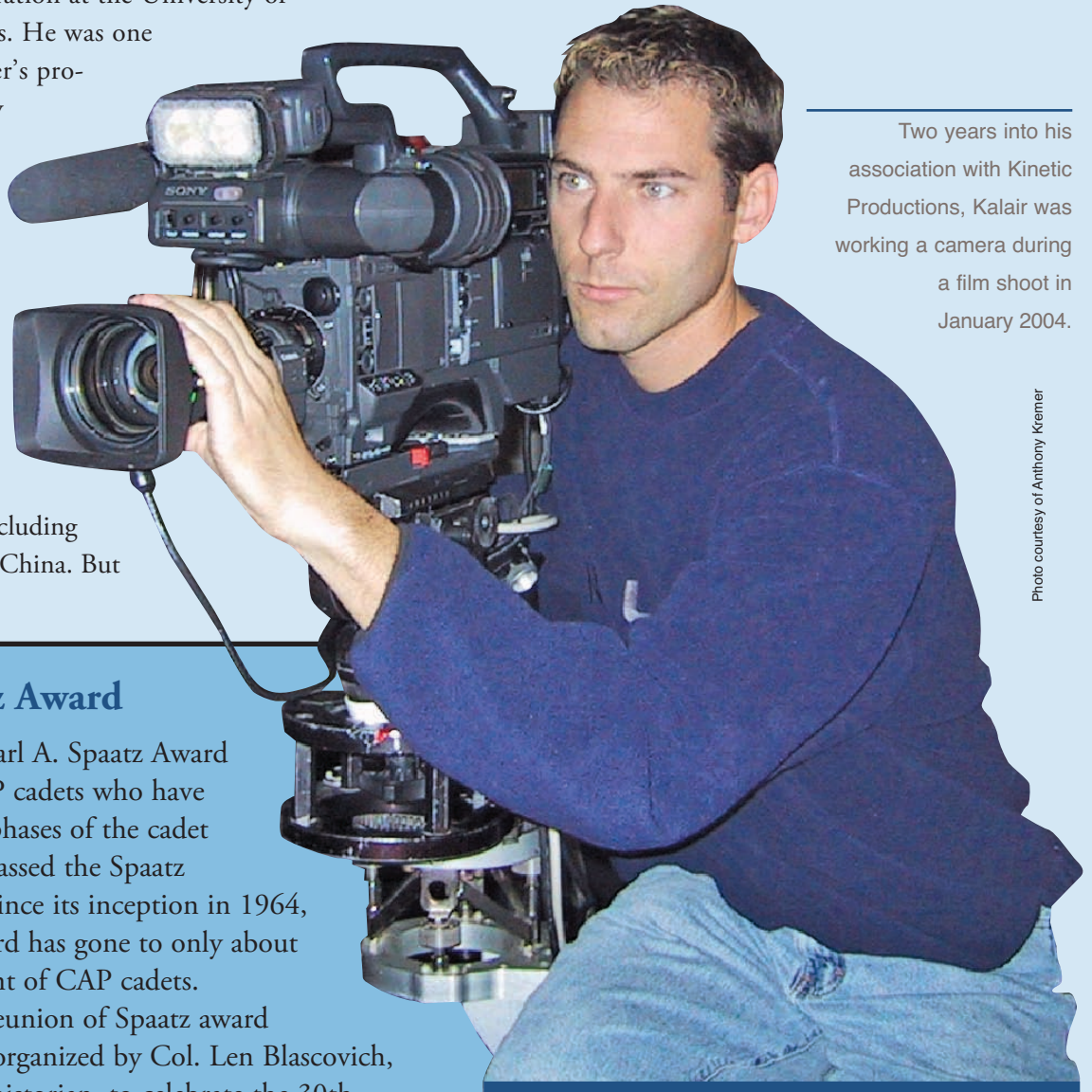


Photo courtesy of Anthony Kremer

The Spaatz Award

The Gen. Carl A. Spaatz Award recognizes CAP cadets who have completed all phases of the cadet program and passed the Spaatz examination. Since its inception in 1964, the Spaatz award has gone to only about half of 1 percent of CAP cadets.

In 1994, a reunion of Spaatz award recipients was organized by Col. Len Blascovich, CAP national historian, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the modern cadet program. The event, dubbed the “Gathering of Diamonds,” led to establishment of the Spaatz Association. The nonprofit organization is comprised of Spaatz award winners scattered across numerous civilian and military positions of responsibility who work through the association to pass on their leadership skills to other cadets.