



# Zaniac, born in Park City, gains national steam

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**By Bubba Brown**

It was about five years ago that Paul Pilzer plucked 16-year-old University of Utah graduate Sidh Oberoi and commissioned him to help write an expansive math curriculum for elementary-age students.

"He said, 'What are we going to do with it?'" Pilzer said. "I was like, 'I don't know, but I know one family that needs it: mine.'"



Two years later, Pilzer and Oberoi opened their first Zaniac education center, in Park City, designed to provide math instruction for students on both sides of the bell curve: those who were struggling and gifted students who weren't being challenged enough in the classroom. The method is simple: Use an assessment to find out which concepts are tripping up a student. Then customize a curriculum to teach them those concepts.

"If you show me a kid who got a 780 on the SAT in math, I'll show you the concept he missed in sixth grade and no one ever measured for it," Pilzer said.

And now, after witnessing the success of the company -- and the incorporation of other programs such as robotics and computer programming -- Pilzer believes Zaniac is on the verge of blossoming into a phenomenon. Zaniac was built with franchising in mind and is set to boast 10 locations by the end of the year. Pilzer, who learned about rapid expansion from his involvement in the gym chain Planet Fitness, is hoping for 20 more next year. Then, he'll shoot for triple digits.

"I see this like Starbucks," said Pilzer, fanning out on the table printed copies of stories major publications such as [U.S. News & World Report](#), [Franchise Times](#) and [CNBC.com](#) have written about Zaniac in recent weeks. "We are basically letting people open stores who have the

wherewithal and business acumen to deliver 10 in their market and own that marketplace. It's very similar to Planet Fitness."

But what Pilzer thinks is truly revolutionary about Zaniac's model are the instructors -- high school students. The Park City Zaniac, for example, hires honor students from Park City High School, who start at \$12 an hour and get an experience they can crow about on their college applications.

"The best teacher of an 8-year-old is an 18-year old," Pilzer said. "The best teacher of a 7-year-old is a 17-year-old. High school honors students are like gods to elementary students. And I can, with technology and tools and video, teach a high school student in a half hour how to run a class for an hour and a half."

And as Zaniac expands, so too do the possibilities for the high school students who work at one. Pilzer said Zaniac has already begun to form relationships with colleges near its locations, meaning students don't have to quit when they graduate high school.

He sees it as sort of a symbiotic relationship. As Zaniac succeeds, so do its high school employees, and vice versa. It's crucial to the bright future Pilzer has planned for the franchise.

"A student who does this in high school not only gets that great experience, when they go to college they can keep working there," he said. "And when they graduate, they can open stores. These things are making -- and we hope this continues -- almost 100 cents on the dollar."

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