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Owner and CEO
Ginger Flesher-Sonnier**



Ginger Flesher- Sonnier

A math teacher turned entrepreneur has struck the right entertainment equation

How does a high school math teacher become the CEO of a multimillion-dollar dining and entertainment empire? Ginger Flesher-Sonnier will be the first to tell you that this transformation wasn't in the cards. When, in 2012, she took an early retirement from teaching, "never in a million years—not in any dream" did she see herself running an elevated hospitality company.

By 2022, she had already designed, operated and sold an escape room business, built up a successful axe-throwing chain, and opened Florida's first THRōW Social in downtown Delray Beach. The indoor-outdoor restaurant-lounge is dotted with diversions, from axe throwing to state-of-the-art dartboards to board games, glow-in-the-dark table tennis and cornhole ramps that went to college.

This past January she cut the ribbon on THRōW's grand opening with a hatchet while flanked by ballerinas in light-up flamingo costumes. It was whimsy with an edge—a defining paradox of Flesher-Sonnier's branding and, thus far, the zenith of her eight-year focus on "experiential entertainment."

While she has always harbored an entrepreneurial spirit—"As a kid I would rake paths through leaves in the yard and then charge kids a nickel to drive through it on a bike"—it was a visit to an escape room in the Czech Republic in 2014 that sparked her interest. The escape-room wave hadn't yet crested in major U.S. cities, but rooms like the one she played in Prague were turning up as No. 1 attractions on TripAdvisor all throughout Europe.

"I thought, this is the culmination of all my decorating skills, all my puzzle skills," Flesher-Sonnier says. "I had been a math teacher for years and a Math League coach for the schools I had been at. It was part of my nature to incorporate puzzles while trying to create an experience."

So she set out to open her own room in Washington, D.C. "What I noticed was that the lobbies [in typical escape rooms] were bare and sparse, and the rooms were shabby, with used furniture or IKEA furniture. I thought, if I had a real design that fit the theme, it would be so much nicer. ... Almost immediately, I had one room open, and there were so many people contacting us to book parties and events, we were sending

them to the Starbucks on the corner because we didn't have a [waiting] room."

Flesher-Sonnier would go on to design 18 escape rooms in three locations in the D.C. metro area, with elaborate, carefully detailed themes like a haunted house, "Back to the '80s" and "Titanic," which required players to, among other challenges, learn Morse code on an antique radio and escape the vessel before it sinks. She sold the venture to an escape-room conglomerate in 2021, having shifted her focus to Kick Axe Throwing; once again forecasting a trend, she had launched three axe-throwing venues, including the first in New York City. She opened the first THRōW Social in February 2020 in Washington, D.C., in the upstairs loft of a Kick Axe.

Flesher-Sonnier moved to South Florida in spring 2020 and soon found the business conditions more suitable than the restrictions of her familiar New York-Pennsylvania-D.C. sphere. "It was so much easier to get going again," she says. "[Up there], it felt like at any moment, they could decide on something new to impose on you. It went from masks to no masks to masks to vaccines, in every city, back and forth, and having to fire people if they didn't get the vaccine. ... We hadn't thought about opening down here; we were like, why not?"

The math teacher in Flesher-Sonnier ran the numbers and made it work. Because of its lucrative gaming aspect—and other innovations, like its covered outdoor VIP cabanas and live music seven days a week—THRōW, she says, operates at a 30 to 35 percent profit margin compared to 10 percent for most restaurants.

She appears to enjoy a charmed life with her husband Darren, a retired Green Beret, in a waterfront property in Lighthouse Point that was a former Designer Showcase for Ronald McDonald House. (Her one daughter Allison, 31, lives in Brooklyn.)

But her ease of living is the result of her ongoing innovation, of scouting Canada and Europe for the next big thing in "entertainment," of building out the sort of places she would like to frequent. She's eyeing locations for future THRōW Socials in Fort Lauderdale and Miami. She is also considering an indoor adult mini-golf concept snaking through a bar and lounge. If her previous track record is any indication, it'll be another hospitality hole-in-one. ☀



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Ginger Flesher-Sonnier