



# THRILL SEEKER

Italians have a reputation for keeping it in the family, and the Zamperlas are no different. Zamperla SpA's Founder Antonio mentored his son Alberto before he became chief executive officer and he's now passing on his knowledge and experience in the amusement rides business to his own son, also called Antonio. The company keeps everything in house, has signed major deals with Disney, and never stops innovating.

**ALBERTO ZAMPERLA** / CEO Zamperla SpA

In 1966, Antonio Zamperla combined his two loves – speed and family amusement – and founded the Zamperla Company in the northern Italian town of Altavilla Vicentina, which soon gained a reputation for manufacturing pioneering amusement rides. The company's stock rose higher after inventing the first bumper cars for kids three years later. In 1971, it won the loyalty of carnival operators all over Italy with the introduction of automatic punch balls – revellers loved them (and still do today). Antonio's son Alberto, who is the current CEO, was then sent to the New World to cut his teeth in the amusement industry, not to mention open Zamperla Inc, an exclusive distributor of the family's products in North America. From this point on the business exploded and today, Alberto's son – named Antonio after his grandfather – is now the company's chief innovation officer, which is quite possibly one of the coolest jobs in the world. He basically explores innovative applications, processes, and services for theme park rides, among other things.

CEO Alberto has overseen some major milestones, including signing a major contract with Disney in 1988, which as he says was “fundamental for Zamperla and its engineers because Disney demands the highest standards possible so we implemented new methods and technology – and from a commercial point of view it

also meant we never had to provide a reference again.” Alberto says he's lucky to have been allowed to make mistakes by his father, who he describes as a “great mentor.”

“My education was very important,” he explains. “My father was very forgiving and gave me room to find out things for myself. For example, when I started we were building some machines for fairgrounds and I sold one to a customer who gave me a cheque, but when I went to pay it in (rather pleased with myself for making the deal) it bounced! I thought I would lose my father's confidence as a result but he said, ‘I knew that person would rip you off.’ So, I asked him why he didn't stop me from doing the deal and he replied, ‘Now you know to be careful, when you're on your own this lesson will stop you making bigger mistakes.’”

In 1996, Alberto spearheaded another huge

move, this time opening Zamperla Asia Pacific in the Philippines, confirming the company's strong international intentions. Today, Zamperla SpA employs more than 450 staff in eight different countries: Slovakia, China, Dubai, UAE, Russia, the US, the Philippines, and of course Italy. “You have to understand the culture of the people where you are working, if not you're going to make a lot of mistakes,” he says. “I was born in an area where a good glass of wine is very important, if you don't drink alcohol people think something is wrong with you. But for Muslims, for example, alcohol is poison so you have to respect and understand their history and culture. But just because you respect people, it doesn't mean you have to agree with them!”

#### **Making history**

Something incredible happened in 2005: Founder Antonio became the first Italian to be inducted into the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Hall of Fame, alongside illustrious pioneers of the amusement world such as Walt Disney. Then, just as the Zamperla family probably thought things couldn't get any better, five years later in 2010 the company won – through the US based company Central Amusement International LLC (C.A.I.) – a prestigious contract to renovate a piece of New York City history: Luna →

“ Disney said our reputation for solving problems is unparalleled – it was a huge compliment ”



Antonio (left) with his dad, Alberto

*“ Working with Zamperla is a unique opportunity, given that it is an innovative company with a vision to create new inclusivity solutions to open up the amusement world to as many people with special needs as possible ”*

Stefano Tamascelli, CEO and founder of XTeam Software Solutions

Park on New York’s Coney Island. Alberto’s son, Antonio (stay with us, we know it’s confusing!) the chief innovation officer was instrumental in the project. “We opened Coney Island in 2010, well, we didn’t just open it, we rebuilt it from the ground up. It was me and my dad (the CEO), working 14 hours a day in the workshop with all the other guys. We brought over 30 people from Italy as we only had 100 days to set up the park, to build and assemble everything, and open it up to the public. Today, the park has two main functions: first an amusement park and second a showroom for all of our rides. We bring clients to the park and let them test the rides themselves, to see first-hand our new attractions,” he said.

CEO Alberto explains that Disney has a company called Disney Imagineering, which boasts more than 5,000 people. Once, when Disney was building a new ride, it decided to call on Zamperla for the roller coaster’s restraining system, which was a huge surprise to Alberto. “I was so shocked! They have thousands of engineers and minds working all hours, and they came to us. I asked them why and they said Zamperla’s reputation for solving problems is unparalleled. It was a huge compliment.”

Given that the environment is such a hot top-

ic, the Italian company is holding a conference in Orlando in the US focussed on alternative energy. Engineers, scientists, and businesspeople will come together to discuss how to make theme park rides greener, how to improve their efficiency and make amusements more accessible for people with disabilities.

“We are also opening an innovation lab where we are going to have philosophers and people from different extractions to talk about what will happen in the future,” Alberto explains. “My son

*“ Antonio Zamperla was the first Italian to be inducted into the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Hall of Fame ”*

Antonio, who is in San Francisco, is in charge of it so all the artists, designers, and people creating new rides and entertainment solutions/devices are going to be in the same place bouncing ideas off each other. They will also discuss how to improve existing rides, not just think about the future. We have a division called Zamperla Plus to help implement new ideas like virtual reality, motion capture, and so on.”

**Control equals quality**

Alberto has witnessed a lot of positive change since he stepped up to lead the company and he’s never shied away from responsibility, which he says is one of the most important things about leadership. He also mentions how it’s important to have control over everything to ensure quality is maintained: “We have the capacity to do everything ourselves, in fact, we are the only amusement rides company that can build an entire theme park!”

So the next time you’re on a roller coaster there’s a good chance it will have been manufactured by the Zamperlas, which means you can sit back and enjoy the ride (while screaming hysterically through gritted teeth, or course!) safe in the knowledge you’re in the best hands. 🎢



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