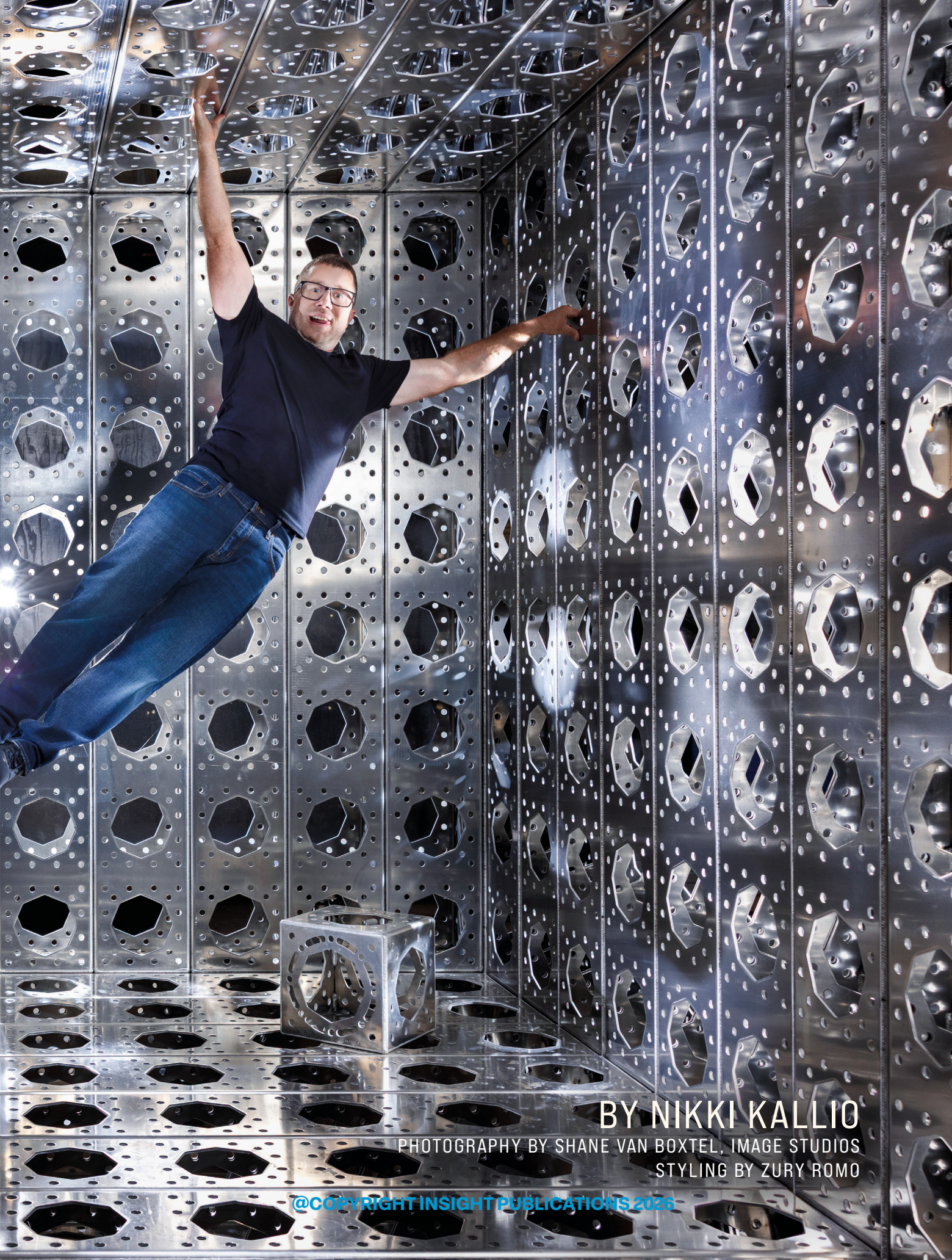




BY NIKKI KALLIO

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In 2016, Maria Fernanda Baranco Toscano was taking a much-needed vacation to Varadero, Cuba from her medical practice in Querétaro, Mexico, relaxing at the crowded Calle 62 bar while watching a band.

An American man — Bryan Perl— walked in with a friend and noticed a couple of the only empty seats left were right next to Maria. They sat, and when his friend got up to get a drink, Bryan struck up a conversation.

“Ten minutes later, I said to my friend, ‘I’m gonna marry this chick someday,’” Bryan recalls.

That serendipitous meeting led to an all-night conversation and another meetup in the town of Cortorro, where Bryan was staying with a friend, which happened to be a block away from where Maria’s uncle lived.

“I came home on a Friday. I had a friend’s wedding on Saturday. Then on Tuesday, I flew to Mexico to see her,” Bryan says. The Perls were engaged in 2017, married in 2018, and had children in 2019 and 2020.

Just like their personal lives, the Perls’ professional relationship has been characterized by big, bold moves. Together, they’ve built several businesses in the years since, with Spark Ops Metalworks emerging as their flagship venture. Spark Ops manufactures structural trusses to build staging for some of the nation’s biggest sports and entertainment broadcasts.

The company was responsible for the playground setup at Road America’s Turn 1, as well as broadcast structures for a range of national and international events such as the NFL, FIFA World Cup and the Olympics — just some of the biggest names on Spark Ops’ growing list of clients.

SERIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Bryan, a self-described serial entrepreneur, grew up in Kiel and owned bars and restaurants before working in venue management, which he was doing when he met Maria. That job included building sets for UFC matches and FOX Sports broadcasts.

Working on those sets repeatedly, Bryan realized there was probably a better way to build them. “A lot of industries are just used to doing things certain ways,” he says. “[But] we can think about things a little differently to get to the same outcome, or potentially a different or better outcome.”

Bryan and his team worked to engineer a product that could work in a virtually unlimited number of scenarios. “The

mouse trap’s already there, right?” Bryan says. “You don’t have to reinvent the entire mouse trap. You just make a better mouse trap.”

That upgraded “mouse trap” is a patented truss called Octra, made from aluminum or steel with a repeating octagonal cutout and a repeating bolt pattern for assembly, made in various sizes ranging from a one-foot-square cube to a 10-foot beam. That versatility allows structures to be configured in just about any way a client would like.

Spark Ops manufactures and sells the structures, which are shipped to the location and built on site. Once an event is done, crews tear down the structures and the products are redeployed to other events.

“When we started Spark Ops, we got the patents on our truss product, and that helped



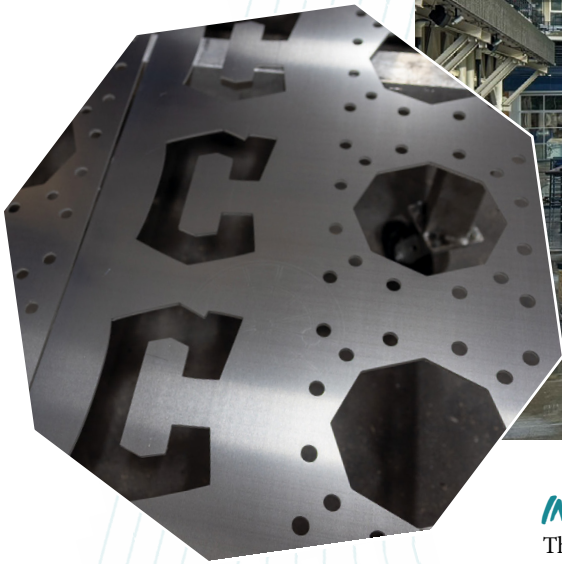
PHOTO COURTESY MARIA AND BRYAN PERL

Maria and Bryan made more than 20 visits each to see each other when they began dating in 2016, shown here in Teotihuacan, Mexico. The Perls married in 2018 and began Spark Ops in 2023.

Spark Ops, which prides itself on adaptability and getting jobs done on a short timeline, once built a 20-by-20-foot broadcast booth for the Cleveland Guardians out of their Octra trusses in eight hours.



PHOTOS COURTESY SPARK OPS



change and transform how we did things and introduce that product to people,” says Bryan, who founded the company in 2023 with Maria as majority owner. “This is another building component that can be used in these structures.”

The Octra truss system is also being used at concerts for large LED panels and video screens.

“The LED walls are getting bigger,” Bryan says. “Now you need more support, and that’s where our structures come in — we’re a better, stronger, more fixed solution.”

Sometimes, the structures are built in challenging locations. One example was the Super Bowl LVIII broadcast set at the Bellagio fountains in Las Vegas. Built for CBS Sports by event company Filmwerks, the set used Spark Ops’ truss system, Maria says.

Spark Ops can deploy projects on a tight timeline; it once built a 20-foot-by-20-foot broadcast booth for the Cleveland Guardians in eight hours. In September, Spark Ops set up a three-story production building for ESPN at the U.S. Open.

“If we don’t have the building done, it’s like well, the U.S. Open’s not going to happen,” Bryan says. “That’s not an option. ... it’s just learning how to pivot and make it happen.”

INFINITE STRUCTURES

That adaptability led to Spark Ops’ partnership with North Carolina-based Infinite Structures, which offers shipping container-sized temporary structures called Infinite Cubes, or I-Cubes.

The I-Cubes are collapsible, meaning eight units can be shipped on one truck, saving time and delivery costs. They are also reconfigurable and can be built with walls or windows, meaning clients aren’t limited to a stack of rectangles and can get creative with themes.

A recent example: A VIP “mega-yacht” built in a Miami parking lot for the Formula 1 event in May which at first glance looked

Bryan says. “That’s the innovation of doing something different.”

Each modular “cube” is actually rectangular: 10 feet high with 160 square feet of floor space. They are often used as VIP rooms and offices at sporting events, replacing the tents in parking lots that had been the standard for decades. Now that VIP experience is elevated, Maria says.

“It’s been a great journey when you talk about our markets and how things have evolved ... we like to say that we are providing solutions because there’s needs in different industries, and they have been reaching out to us,” she says.

“I tell [Bryan] often that we are a very good team because we can see different things.”

— Maria Perl

seaworthy. The mega-yacht included several swimming pools, a restaurant and panoramic views of the track. Spark Ops manufactured all the components used in the mega-yacht structure, completing the project in about four-and-a-half months.

That partnership with Infinite Structures “is really where [business has] exploded, and where the real growth has come from,”

David Fioravanti, CEO and principal of Infinite Structures, says the I-Cube system is “so versatile and modular and repeatable. It can do many different variations of layouts. Then combine that with Bryan’s patented truss component [and] it gives us a very high level of modularity, versatility, because a lot of our clients want us to do things in unique locations.”

[continued] ▶

They started out with prototypes for Live Nation, Coachella and Lollapalooza, then the final version for another festival in December 2024. Then came the FOX broadcasting project with the Super Bowl in February 2025. “And that was like 15,000 square feet of product, over 110 cubes,” Fioravanti says.

That was the point at which the floodgates opened, Fioravanti says.

“Word of mouth spreads very fast, and I know a majority of all the key players,” he says. “Once they saw what I was doing, who I was with ... that kind of created the perfect storm, in a good way.”

STRATEGIC MOMENTUM

Because Spark Ops was growing so rapidly, Bryan and Maria turned to the Green Bay Packers Mentor Protégé Program to help them scale their business.

The program offers resources and pairs growing companies with experienced mentors — in this case Schneider National CEO Jim Filter, who provided his expertise to help the Perls strategize as they grew, says Anna Steinfest, co-creator and administrator of the program.

The Perls graduated from the 12-month program at the end of 2025, recognized as the Most Valuable Protégé, with revenue growth over 1,000%.

Spark Ops Metalworks

Founded: 2023

Co-owners: Maria and Bryan Perl

Location: Fond du Lac

What it does: Manufacturer of structural trusses for staging used in national sports and entertainment broadcasts, as well as platforms for the aviation industry; OEM fabricator and the exclusive partner and part owner of Infinite Structures, North Carolina-based manufacturer of a collapsible unit with multiple uses

Employees: 27

sparkopsglobal.com

“The most successful protégés are the coachable ones. And they’re willing to take action when they receive feedback ... And [the Perls] were very open when they entered the program.”

— Anna Steinfest, co-creator and administrator, Green Bay Packers Mentor Protégé Program

“I can tell you that the most successful protégés are the coachable ones,” Steinfest says. “And they’re willing to take action when they receive feedback ... And [the Perls] were very open when they entered the program.”

Fioravanti says what the Perls have been able to accomplish in a small amount of time “is unbelievable ... It’s a perfect relationship, and it’s one that I never want to see go away.”

Because Infinite Structures is part of a “no error” industry, it means “we have to hit our deadlines because TV or sporting events are going on when they go on,” Fioravanti says. “So having a manufacturer that pays very close attention to those details and, you know, those specifics is really important. Plus, Bryan can turn around things very fast for us.”

An example: Spark Ops set up seven I-Cube structures at Coachella for Google Pixel in five hours, Maria says.

Beyond the business relationship, Fioravanti says the Perls “are two of the most amazing human beings I’ve met... I’ve gotten to know Bryan over 15 years, Maria since they’ve been married, and you know they’re both just amazing individuals — compassionate, caring, very responsible. Just great friends, great confidants, people I can trust. You know, great business minds.”

As Spark Ops and Infinite Structures continue to grow, the companies are aiming for new business in the form of government contracts. The structures are designed to be used for temporary housing, temporary dorms, temporary jail facilities, temporary hospitals and remote bases for forestry.

Spark Ops products are also used for platforms for the aviation industry, making maintenance easier and safer, Maria says.

The Perls and Fioravanti have built relationships within government and municipalities and have been bidding on projects while educating leaders on the product’s capabilities since “it’s a new product that hasn’t existed in North America,” Fioravanti says.

EXPANDING WITH GROWTH

Spark Ops’ success also means it has had to find enough room to grow physically. Currently, the company is operating out of five different locations in Fond du Lac. Around the end of 2024, the Perls started looking for a more efficient solution, and they were nearly lured to Sheboygan County with the offer of free land from the city of Plymouth.

“I’m like, ‘whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, just a minute here. Hang on a second; not on my watch! We’ve got to have a conversation here,’” remembers Lisa MacArthur, vice president of economic development for Envision Greater Fond du Lac. MacArthur had been working on revamping the stagnant Aeronautical Industrial Park, which sat virtually empty for more than 20 years. “We were struggling to get anybody in,” she says. The Perls, who didn’t really want to move away from Fond du Lac, had reached out to Envision to see what might be available.

That’s when MacArthur approached County Executive Sam Kaufman to see if



PHOTOS COURTESY SPARK OPS



Spark Ops manufactured every component of a “mega-yacht” VIP structure for the Formula 1 event in Miami this year. The structure included Oetra and I-Cube products configured to allow for swimming pools, a restaurant and panoramic views of the track.

they could come up with a deal for the Perls. Kaufman took the idea to the county’s finance committee.

“When we knew that they were looking to build a multi-million-dollar facility and expand with another facility in a few years, we thought this was a perfect opportunity for us,” Kaufman says. “We get to keep them in town. They were going to be able to hire more employees. And we were now taking that county property and turning it into a taxable property, too.”

At first, Kaufman wasn’t aware of Spark Ops or what it did. “When I started looking into them more and started realizing the type of unique business that they actually have in Fond du Lac County, it was just absolutely amazing,” he says.

Nobody, in fact, really knew who they were or what they did, the Perls say. “When we started to explain, ‘Oh, but we have done the Super Bowl and we have done Formula 1,’ they’re like, ‘But where are you?’ ‘We’re right here on Cedar Street,’” Maria says. “We never told anyone, so we are doing a better job at that.”

“What Spark Ops brings to the table is their reputation, and the uniqueness of what it is they build,” Kaufman says. “We’re just so fortunate to have them here.”

The Fond du Lac County Board approved the sale of just over 24 acres of land to the Perls for \$25,000. The first phase, which broke ground on St. Patrick’s Day, is a \$7 million-plus investment in a 156,000-square-foot building, which Spark Ops hopes will be ready by December, Maria says. The second phase will be an 80,000-square-foot, \$4.5 million building in 2027.

“Every economic developer’s dream is having one of these projects where a business is going to leave and you get in front of them, you pitch them, you find the spot, you get the public involved,” says Envision President and CEO Sadie Howell. “They stay, they continue to be successful. They grow, they add. It’s like what we all chase in economic development. It is absolutely one of our highlights.”

WORKING TOGETHER

The Spark Ops team is eagerly anticipating its move to the new facility. “Everybody’s very excited about it,” Maria says. “They see the growth. They’re very proud of the product, proud of being part of this progress. It’s been a journey.”

Now, Spark Ops is looking at how it might expand beyond the U.S. “The possibilities and these opportunities are ginormous,” Maria says. In May, she traveled to China with UW-Green Bay’s Business in China program and the Small Business Development Center.

Maria, who went to medical school in Cuba and worked as a general practitioner in rural communities in Querétaro — largely working with children — had originally planned to gain licensing to practice medicine when she moved to Wisconsin. But with her first pregnancy, she began to look into the number of hours and on-call time required by U.S. hospitals.

Entrepreneurship began to make a lot more sense. “We’re bringing solutions for people, and this is my way to help others,” she says.

Maria says she will still put her medical degree to work, potentially volunteering with Doctors Without Borders. And, in addition

to the Perls’ growing list of businesses, which include concession stands, a mansion rental on Lake Michigan, carpet cleaning, a print shop and other ventures, Maria is planning to establish a nonprofit focused on nutritional education for children.

While both Bryan and Maria share creativity and drive, they have different personalities and different ways of approaching work.

“I think we’re two totally different spectrums,” Bryan says. “She’s from the medical side, so everything’s planned, proper protocol, proper procedures. And I’ve done the restaurants. [With] restaurants, you just make it happen. ... We’re total opposites. But it just merges perfectly. The best of both sides.”

“I tell him often that we are a very good team because we can see different things,” Maria says.

Maria also says their Spark Ops team makes all the difference, understanding of the sometimes-long hours the company asks.

“We feel like they get so proud when they say, ‘Oh, did you see that on the TV? I made that.’ So that sense of pride, it’s immersed in the company from the welder to the grinder,” she says. “We’re very proud of our team and of their mindset.”

Bryan says along with Spark Ops’ rapid growth, they’re constantly innovating.

“How do we make it better for our customer? How do we make the product better? How do we make it better for the employee? How do we make it better for us?” he says. “You’re always trying to find that next new innovative way to succeed and push forward.” ①