



**Born in Ocean City, Built for the Future:
D3 Celebrates 30 Years of Bold Ideas, Innovation, and Community Impact**

OCEAN CITY, MD What began as a spark of curiosity, a car full of yellow pages, and one fateful phone call to the Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association, has grown into one of the region's most respected digital marketing and web development agencies. This month, D3 Corp celebrates 30 years of helping businesses on the Delmarva Peninsula and beyond connect, grow, and thrive online.

For founder John Gehrig, the journey to Ocean City was anything but predictable. "In the early 1990s, I was selling Yellow Page ads and experimenting with side gigs," Gehrig recalls. "Then I heard about this new thing called the 'World Wide Web.' I didn't really know what it was—but I knew it was going to be something big."

That hunch—and a little boldness—set everything in motion. Sitting in rush hour traffic on the Baltimore Beltway, Gehrig decided it was time for a change. With an Ocean City phone book on the passenger seat, he flipped to the O's and dialed the first number he saw: the Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association (HMRA).

The call was answered by Susan Jones, who had just started in her own role with the organization. "I was working out of the Convention Center at the time," Jones recalls. "John called and requested an appointment. I was in sales, so I wasn't going to be a jerk to a salesperson. When he walked in, he had this presence and determination. I did not know what the World Wide Web was, but I learned a lot about it from him."

At that time, Ocean City did not yet have a dedicated destination marketing entity. "John came in and said, 'I'm going to build a website for Ocean City,'" Jones says. "We thought he was crazy—but he was smart, and he taught us all about the internet. He brought knowledge from that side of the bridge to this side of the bridge—30 years ago."

With Jones' support, HMRA leadership—including then-president Vicki Morris—took a leap of faith on this new idea. "I convinced my president to give him a chance," Jones says with a smile. "It didn't hurt that John was so cute—but really, people buy from people they like, and John was genuine, humble, and easy to believe in."

The partnership would go on to make history. The HMRA became one of the first organizations in Ocean City to embrace online marketing, working with Gehrig to build Ocean-City.com, the first tourism website for the resort town. That site, along with D3's early booking and hospitality tools, became the foundation for how Ocean City's tourism industry began promoting itself online.

"Twenty years ago, John told us we needed a booking engine—nobody wanted to listen," Jones says. "But he saw where things were heading. Eventually, HMRA became the booking engine for Ocean City. John was right then, and he has been ahead of the curve ever since."

Over the years, the collaboration between D3, HMRA, and other community organizations—including the Ocean City Chamber of Commerce—helped shape the resort's marketing strategy and digital identity. "John was a big part of forging those early alliances," Jones says. "We worked together to push tourism to the next level. We advocated raising the room tax and dedicating it to marketing, and that formula, written by G. Hale Harrison, still exists today. We were all part of a movement to strengthen Ocean City's tourism voice."

That movement led to the eventual creation of the Tourism Advisory Board in 2010—an effort Jones, Gehrig, and Chamber President Melanie Pursel spearheaded to unite tourism stakeholders and strengthen Ocean City's position as a top East Coast destination. "We fought for marketing dollars, for events, for leadership—and in 2020, we got Tom Perlozzo as our 'captain of the tourism ship.' It has come full circle, and John was a big part of that foundation," says Jones.

Beyond the history and innovation, what stands out most to those who have worked with Gehrig is his character. "He's honest, humble, and not afraid to stand up for what he believes in," says Jones. "He has never been about ego—he just genuinely wants to help. That's why D3 has lasted 30 years. It is built on relationships, trust, and community."

For Gehrig, the feeling is mutual. "Those first clients and partners became lifelong friends," he says. "People like Susan, Vicki, Greg Foster, Adam Shaw—they took a chance on me. Ocean City gave me a shot when all I had was an idea and a phone book. This community helped build D3—and we've never forgotten that."

About D3 Corp

Founded in 1995 in Ocean City, Maryland, D3 is a full-service digital marketing and web development agency serving businesses across the Mid-Atlantic. Specializing in website design, online marketing, and custom digital solutions, D3 helps organizations tell their story, reach their audiences, and grow their success online. Learn more at www.d3corp.com.