



BY KIM KACHMANN-GELTZ

KROGER'S CHIEF **FUN** OFFICER

**Mike Schlotman** is chief financial officer and executive vice president of the Kroger Co. He envisioned and helped engineer the Kroger superstore and revitalization of Shelter Cove on Hilton Head Island.

"I don't call myself the chief financial officer, I call myself the chief fun officer," he said.

As a kid, Schlotman ran Kool-Aid stands to make money. Starting at age five, for a quarter a week, he would take out his uncle's trash.

"I grew up in Kentucky and lived in a 600-square-foot house with two brothers. I like to think that, if I lost everything today, I'd be okay. Part of my philosophy is, 'Remember where you came from.' Another part of my philosophy that my mother taught me is, 'I can't' never did anything.'"

Schlotman was the first kid in his family to go to college.

"My dad didn't talk to me for two years after I left," he said. "Our family heritage was that you go to high school, you get a job and go to work. Dad would question who the hell I was going off to college."

His father lost his job at TWA when Schlotman was in high school. He decided that he didn't want to be like him — 51 years old and laid off without a college education to fall back on.

Because of his family's hardships, Schlotman thinks giving back to the community and helping people are key. He recently

donated to the local Little League to put it over the top of its fundraising goal.

"Meanwhile, my work philosophy is that if you wait for the perfect time to do something, you'll never do anything. You have to make the time right when it's mostly right."

Schlotman applied this philosophy to the revitalization of Shelter Cove.

"It was always a dream of mine to have a Kroger store on the island. I knew it would

be successful, but finding the right spot wasn't easy," he said. "When the bankrupt mall became available, a great opportunity fell into our laps."

Some islanders criticize Kroger and its joint venture partner, Blanchard & Calhoun, for taking out too many trees to develop the complex. Schlotman points out that they planted 50 percent more trees than they took down.

"The proof is in the pudding. We stayed true to what the island's founding fathers wanted. We took the heart of the island out, and gave it a heart transplant. It has a healthy, strong heartbeat now," Schlotman said. "The complex is successful beyond expectations."

If Schlotman could do one thing to help his customers eat and live better, it would be to be to embrace Kroger's health and wellness initiative.

"We have bike racks and bike pumps at our store," he said. "We've introduced more natural and organic products, including the Simple Truth product line. You'll find it throughout the store in all of the aisles."

When asked how he feels about quinoa and kale, he says he hasn't acquired a taste for quinoa yet.

"But it's interesting that kale turned out to be a superfood — I ate it all the time growing up. It was cheap. My mom would put lots of butter, kielbasa and potatoes in it, which didn't make it that healthy, but I loved it." **M**