

MODERN LUXURY

DC

THE TRAVEL *ISSUE*

PATRICK
DEMPSEY

On Fast Cars,
World Travel,
Giving Back and
Grey's 11th Season

WHITE OUT!
THE LUXE AND LATEST
GUIDE TO THE SLOPES
EPICUREAN DELIGHTS,
ISLAND-STYLE
BEST NEW HOTELS
FROM NYC TO VEGAS

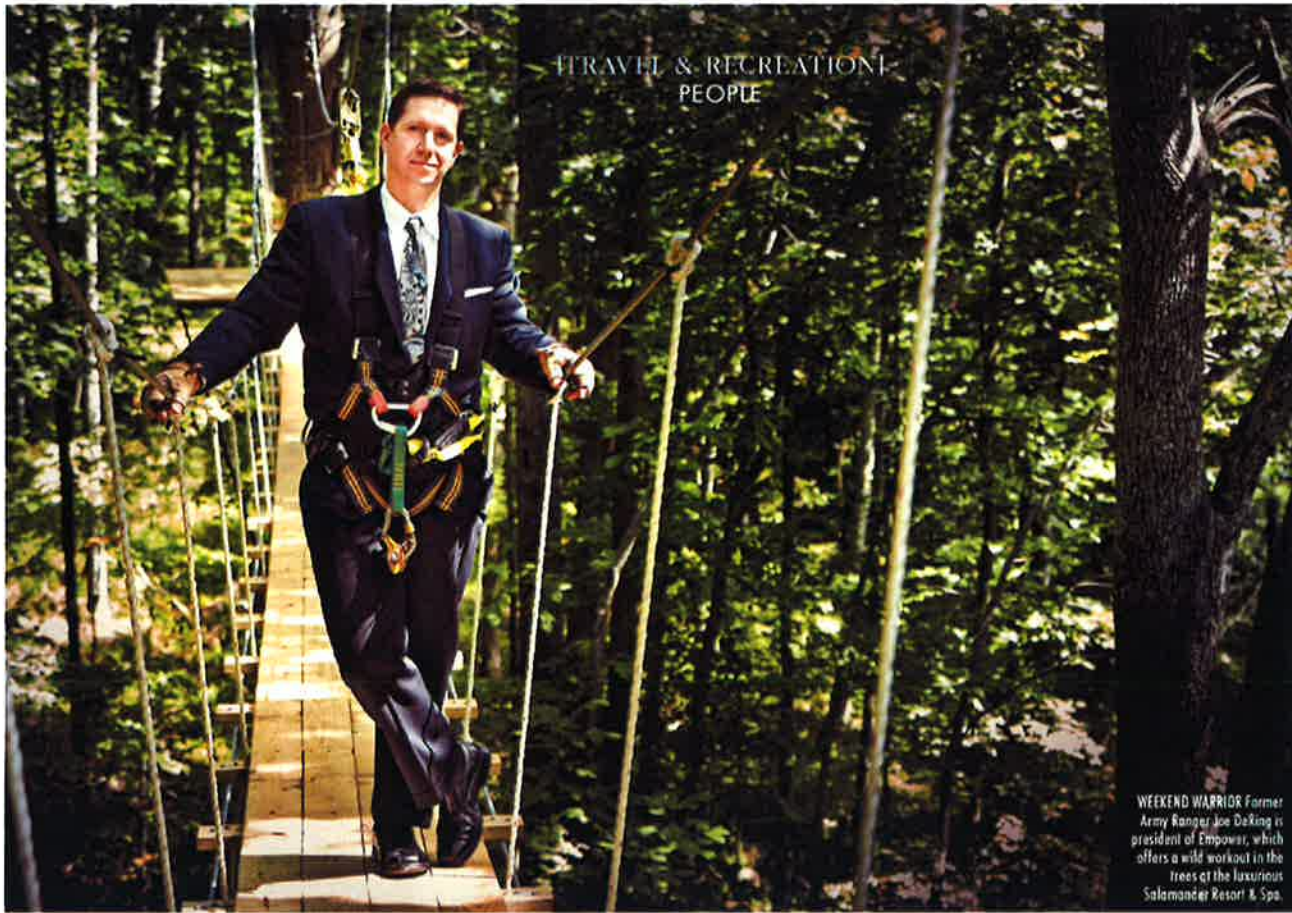
SARAH JESSICA PARKER
Falling in Love With DC

OVAL INDULGENCE
Classic Restaurant
Redux Debuts

MODERN MODE
New Superstars (e)merge

SWEET HOME ITALIA
Wright Meets Boffi

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SKY-HIGH

LUXURY AND THRILLS COME TOGETHER IN THE TREES THIS FALL AT THE SALAMANDER RESORT & SPA.

By Michael McCarthy | Photography by Photography by Greg Powers

The first thing you notice when you're strapped into a harness and 60 feet above the forest floor is the silence—interrupted with soft birdsong and a breeze that ruffles chestnut oak leaves. In the forest canopy, any nagging issue you had before Joe DeRing and his team ushered you up here recedes. It's peace with a physical component, one that includes zipping from one sturdy platform to another at intervals 500 to 700 feet apart.

DeRing—an Army Ranger from 2001 to 2008, serving in both Iraq and Afghanistan—is the president of Empower, which recently opened a zip line and rappelling experience at the luxurious Salamander Resort & Spa. The fact that DeRing's state-of-the-art playground is at Salamander feeds into an unequalled amenity experience—one that includes teaching the expansive 20-act course by being ferried from

the property's manicured lawn to the option of indulging in Salamander's spa, après zip lining. DeRing focuses on fun—and a workout like no other—for couples, families and even corporate groups who desire a team-building experience.

"Since I started this business, I've never worked a day in my life," says DeRing as he explains how to slow yourself down once reaching roughly 25 miles per hour (answer: you gently tap the cable with one of your gloved hands). "This is an amazing physical challenge, but it's also a mental one, making it pretty unusual among weekend pursuits."

DeRing and his team shine on top-notch and thorough instruction, as well as safety. There's never any doubt he was an Army Ranger, a man who once led his 30-person platoon in Baghdad during a fierce daylong firefight. The seven different stations—or treehouses of

thrills—are connected via zip lines and rope bridges. Each guest flies at his or her own pace, working upper-body and core muscles. "Once you zip to your first station, the nerves that some people might have seem to fade, and confidence grows," says DeRing. "I then encourage people to look around and take everything in. You can see plenty of wildlife on the property. It's pretty magical." If guests are so inclined, DeRing says they can try a free rappel from one of the platforms—a descent that requires a degree of steely resolve. "The rappel reminds me of my days doing the same from a Blackhawk helicopter," says DeRing, laughing. "We can't be afraid to take risks in life. We also can't be afraid to have fun." And, yes, that fun might include hot-stone therapy in the spa afterward. *From \$325, zip tour, \$164, 500 N. Poulleton St., Middleburg, Va., 866.938.7370, salamanderresort.com*