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# Syracuse native behind new Willy Wonka-like golden ticket contest for a candy factory

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In this Oct. 12, 2011 photo, David Klein, a man who came up with the name Jelly Belly, poses for photos in Covina, Calif. AP Photo/Jae C. Hong

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A Syracuse native is the dreamer of dreams behind a new Willy Wonka-like contest that's getting widespread attention.

David Klein, the original Mr. Jelly Belly who came up with the popular candy's name, launched a competition in the U.S. called "The Gold Ticket." Klein says he's hidden multiple "golden tickets" -- gold necklaces with a tag that includes a code to verify its authenticity -- worth \$5,000 in every state.

Players will then be eligible for the "ultimate prize," which is the key to a candy factory, says Klein, who refers to himself as "The Candyman."

"We're looking for you, Charlie, out there," he said.

The contest is inspired by Roald Dahl's famous book, "Charlie and the Charlie Factory," which was adapted into a 1971 movie starring Gene Wilder as Willy Wonka and a 2005 remake starring Johnny Depp. The story centers on a poor boy named Charlie Bucket who finds a golden ticket in a chocolate bar and wins a trip to Wonka's factory, and eventually gets to own the factory himself.

But there are many differences between the fictional contest and Klein's creation. For starters, not just anyone can play: Treasure hunters must register online at [www.thegoldticket.com](http://www.thegoldticket.com) and pay \$50 to receive the riddle, game location and start date. All participants will also get a free 40-piece Spectrum Confections CBD 10mg Jelly Bean pack.

"The registered person who purchased the game play will be signed up in a private forum. You must have a Facebook account," the website states. "We have been hit with a huge response and we are making every attempt to handle your orders. We will respond to everyone, but it might take a bit of time."

There's a cap of 1,000 participants per state, and some states have sold out, Klein said. Tickets in some states have not yet been made available for purchase.

Those who get golden tickets will then be eligible for The Ultimate Treasure Hunt, with a prize of a 4,000-square foot Candyman Kitchens candy factory in Florida.

According to [ABC](#), the factory itself is still in development, and the winner will "probably" have to pay some taxes and hire their own employees. But the prize will also include an all-expenses paid trip to a candy-making course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“This might be the most important thing. They’re going to get my time. I’m going to be their mentor,” Klein told ABC. “I will be available 24 hours a day to answer any questions, help them launch new products, help them name products, show them how to get their products off the ground.”

Klein, 73, was born in Syracuse, N.Y., in 1946. According to the 2010 documentary “Candyman: The David Klein Story,” he moved to California with his family at age 3, but noted that friends told him he had an “East Coast” accent even decades later.

Klein’s contest has created some confusion as some reports have referred to him as the inventor or founder of Jelly Belly, the popular jelly bean brand.

Klein came up with the idea of infusing jelly beans with flavor on the inside and creating fun new flavors, like cotton candy, and contacted the Herman Goelitz Candy Company about developing the product to be sold at his California ice cream shop. In 1976, he invited a reporter from the Associated Press to the store and had fake customers line up out the door; the stunt made national news and put Jelly Belly on the map.

Klein also came up with the name “Jelly Belly” and appeared on television as its spokesperson, Mr. Jelly Belly. He even appeared in People magazine, semi-nude in a [bathtub full of Jelly Belly jelly beans](#).

The Jelly Belly Candy Company released a [statement](#) Tuesday distancing themselves from Klein, who sold the name to the Herman Goelitz Candy Company in 1980. The family-owned and operated company, which first started making candy in 1869 under Gustav Goelitz, changed its name to the Jelly Belly Candy Company in 2001.



“Jelly Belly Candy Company has not had a relationship with Mr. Klein since 1980 when it acquired the trademark,” the company said.

Klein is also not the only one sending adventurers out on crazy treasure hunts, either.

The Upstate New York-based Bad Pirate Tre.ventures is giving away \$5,000 to the winners of an outdoor treasure hunt in different cities. Events are scheduled for Sept. 19 in Monroe County, Sept. 20 in Erie County, Sept. 26 in Onondaga County and the Albany area, and Oct. 3 in Rockland/Westchester and Nassau/Suffolk. Participants similarly need to pay \$55 for a Hunt Key to join; for more information, visit [mtbadpirate.com](http://mtbadpirate.com).