

Looking for the right franchise? FranchiseMart wants to help

New Louisville business follows retail model in franchise consulting

BY BEN ADKINS | STAFF WRITER
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A new Louisville business is applying a retail model to franchise consulting.

FranchiseMart allows prospective franchise owners to effectively "shop" for a franchise by browsing promotional materials from national and international franchises.

The prospects work with a consultant to get paired with the appropriate business opportunity.

Brian and Maggie Harlow opened FranchiseMart Louisville in late September at 909 E. Market St.

Second franchise for couple

FranchiseMart is, in itself, a franchise — one of five concepts offered by West Palm Beach, Fla.-based United Franchise Group.

The group's other concepts include embroidery and screen printing chain EmbroidMe, which has two Louisville-area locations, and sign business Sign-A-Rama, which operates in 50 countries.

The Louisville EmbroidMe outlets, at 4600 Shelbyville Road and 3556 Springhurst Blvd., are owned by Patricia and Mike Noll, and Gary and Faith Hopper, respectively.

The desire to open the FranchiseMart business stemmed partly from personal experience, Maggie Harlow said. She was a

manager at Jaguar of Louisville and her husband owned a construction business before they bought a Sign-A-Rama franchise in 2003.



Harlow

The Harlows' Sign-A-Rama Downtown is one of five Sign-A-Rama locations in Louisville, each of which has separate ownership.

Sign-A-Rama Downtown operates in space adjoining the recently opened FranchiseMart. Together, they occupy nearly 9,000 square feet in a 17,000-square-foot

building that the couple owns.

Stremelyne Graphics Inc. and Cake Flour LLC also lease space in the building.

Becoming franchise owners, Harlow said, "transformed our lives."

"We thought it would be really fun to help others do that as well."

The couple invested about \$100,000 to open FranchiseMart, she said.

Franchise options vary for customers

In creating the FranchiseMart concept, United Franchise Group has forged partnerships with about 125 franchises that serve a wide variety of industries, Harlow said, from pet-grooming to automotive services.

Some of the available franchises can be run part time or from home, Harlow said, and startup investments range from \$20,000 to \$2 million.

The consulting services are free to those looking to buy into a franchise. Fran-

Accurate Franchising Inc. works with individuals looking to franchise their business by helping with tasks such as franchise strategy and document and manual writing. Franchise Greenhouse helps existing franchises field phone calls and work with leads for prospective franchisees.

Franchises have high success rate

Harlow acknowledged that some would-be franchisees might give pause to starting a business in a down economy.

"Certainly belts are tightening and entrepreneurs are looking twice at making big investments," she said.

FranNet is a Louisville-based franchise consultant and brokerage firm, offering services similar to FranchiseMart. Thom Crimans, a FranNet franchisee who has been with the company since 1994 and president of FranNet of Mid-America, which covers territory in Kentucky and Indiana, said FranchiseMart has a model unlike others providing similar services in the area.

To his knowledge, he said, others do not operate a retail model such as FranchiseMart. But he said "there are lots of different approaches in every industry."

Crimans said his business has not seen extreme highs or lows this year and has been fairly "mid-range." He believes "the jury's still out" on whether the economic downturn will have an impact on franchising.

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FRANCHISEMART LOUISVILLE

Type of business:

Consultant for franchisors and franchisees

Address: 909 E. Market St.

Owners: Brian and Maggie Harlow

Employees: Four

Web site: www.

franchisemart-louisvilledowntown.com

Other FranchiseMart

locations: West Palm Beach, Fla.; Boca Raton, Fla.; Doral, Fla.; Las Vegas, Nev.; Charleston, S.C.; Spartanburg, S.C.; Franklin, Tenn.; Australia





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The consulting services are free to those looking to buy into a franchise. FranchiseMart is paid a flat rate by the franchisors once the franchisee signs on, although Harlow declined to say what the rate is.

FranchiseMart also provides services offered by subsidiaries of its parent company to entrepreneurs seeking to turn an independent business into a franchise, and it helps franchisors market their businesses to potential franchisees.

Other FranchiseMart locations: West Palm Beach, Fla.; Boca Raton, Fla.; Doral, Fla.; Las Vegas, Nev.; Charleston, S.C.; Spartanburg, S.C.; Franklin, Tenn.; Australia

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"In some ways, our industry kind of does well in good times and not-so-good times," he said. "Most people (get into franchising) not just because of the money but" because they want to be in charge of their future.

Harlow agreed.

But she also believes franchising can provide stability in a shaky economy, she said. "I think, in some ways, people feel like they want to take control of their destiny." |

Anthem Foundation donates \$600,000 for next round of follow-up cardiovascular screenings

The Anthem Foundation Inc., the philanthropic arm of Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, this week made a \$600,000 grant to fund follow-up health screenings for West Louisville residents deemed to be "at risk" for cardiovascular disease.

The at-risk residents initially were screened during a wellness program that was sponsored last year by the University of Louisville and the Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness.

"We know that economic disparities lead to health disparities and that we need to be part of the solution," U of L president James Ramsey said in a news release.

Dr. Sumanth Prabhu, a U of L cardiologist, will lead a team that will screen the residents for cardiovascular risk based on a variety of factors, including medical and family history, medications, diet and level of physical activity.

Aruni Bhatnagar, director of the Environmental Cardiology program, will analyze

patient data and environmental factors. The team also will work with David Tollerud, from the university's School of Public Health and Information Sciences.

During the evaluations, medical professionals will provide assistance to help the residents make lifestyle changes such as lowering cholesterol, stopping smoking and managing high blood pressure and diabetes.

"When you consider the number of Kentuckians who suffer from heart disease, it is clear that more public/private partnerships are needed to positively impact this dangerous trend," Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield president Deb Moessner said in the release.

"We are pleased to partner with the university on such an important initiative that will make a difference in the lives of many," she added.

— BEN ADKINS