

# THE BOERNE STAR

October 16, 2009

## Experienced workers launching new careers find opportunities with franchise businesses

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Coming out of retirement and launching a new career as an entrepreneur during a recession, Alan Dorothy found success in a crowded field the old fashioned way - finding and tapping into a niche market.

Within three months of opening his Fresh Coat Painting franchise in the competitive Leon Springs area, he had jobs booked four and a half weeks out. His crew includes three full-time and two part-time painters.

"There are 400 painting companies in the Northwest San Antonio market," Dorothy said, adding that while new home construction is down in the traditionally fast-growing San Antonio area, there's a market for affordable home repair and spruce-up services.

In addition to the home-remodeling trend, he says he attributes his success to pricing and gearing the service to small jobs.

"It's geared toward people who want to paint just one room," he explained. He also noted that the one-room, one-price service often leads to additional work and more jobs.

Of course, the company takes larger jobs as well - such as repainting commercial lease space to get it ready for the next tenant. However, the jobs are still not likely to appeal to major contractors.

Dorothy says he and his friends, fellow military retirees, are victims of the recession much like younger people who've been laid off.

"We lost our retirement investments," he explained. "I have several friends who are back in the business world after retirement trying to recoup losses."

After Dorothy retired from the Army in 1997 his family moved to Fair Oaks Ranch, where he opened his own home repair-contracting business after working for a construction company. The work kept him as busy or not busy as he wanted to be.

"I wanted to be able to dictate my own schedule," he said.

The Dorothys now reside off Boerne Stage Road near Leon Springs.

When his wife became ill with cancer, Dorothy took off a year to care for her. "After my wife was well enough to return to work, I started thinking about what I needed to do," he said.

He'd made a lot of contacts in the construction industry through his earlier work so that was a natural area to consider.

"But, I looked at a lot of things and decided to research franchise opportunities," he said. "I wanted to find something where I didn't have to reinvent the wheel."

In the course of two years, Dorothy said he looked at virtually all the franchise companies in the country. He decided on his priorities: a business he knew something about; affordable investment; and growth



Business owner Alan Dorothy stands with his Fresh Coat Painting truck that serves as his "office."

opportunity.

"I looked for a business I could build and pass on to my sons," he explained.

As he researched with these goals in mind, he looked at the training programs and support offered by the various franchise companies. And, he contacted the companies to ask lots of questions.

"I talked to one guy so much I wore him out," he said. "Finally, I flew out to the company headquarters to talk with him in person."

Dorothy decided the Fresh Coat Painting franchise was a good fit - the company was interested in the San Antonio market and it was a field where he could use his former experience and contacts in the construction industry.

According to the Medill College of Business, the number of new businesses spikes during economic downturns, in part because people who lose their jobs or retirement income are motivated to start their own businesses as a means of controlling their own financial and career futures. In turn, new business start-ups are good for the local economy.

Franchises offer expertise, proven track records and brand name recognition - elements that help reduce the risks of entrepreneurship, according to the International Franchise Association.

Dorothy said he thinks franchises are a good fit for experienced workers like himself.

"I have several friends who are also looking at franchises," he said.

Depending on the type of business, franchises offer different levels of training and support. New franchisees have a system to follow based on the company's track record. Some companies help new owners find and develop a location, and determine how to get inventory and supplies.

Dorothy said he appreciated the

help with finding and contracting for accounting, payroll and other bookkeeping services.

"It relieves the headache of small business," he said. "I can concentrate on sales (booking jobs) and customer service," he said.

Dorothy's "office" consists of his brightly painted truck and wireless phone, keeping his overhead low. He also has a computer at home for business functions.

Paint and materials are purchased for each contract and his painters - all bonded professionals - have and use their own equipment, so there are no expenses for warehouse or inventory.

"Right now, there's lots of work," Dorothy said, adding that as the state weathers the recession, he's gaining experience and contacts that will pay off when the boom returns.

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For more information about franchises, there are a variety of Web sites and other resources. Some are [www.franchisebusinessreview.com](http://www.franchisebusinessreview.com), [www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com) and the International Franchise Association, [www.franchise.org](http://www.franchise.org). In addition, area colleges and universities offer programs in entrepreneurship.

Despite the deepening recession, Texas gained small businesses last year, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy. The number of self-employed people in Texas rose 2 percent in 2008 while dropping 2 percent nationwide, the report said.

Combining resources from several state agencies, the Texas Is Wide Open for Business Web site offers information for starting a small business, including help with choosing a business structure, filing for a tax identification number and links to state and federal resources and assistance. For more information, visit [www.texaswideopenforbusiness.com](http://www.texaswideopenforbusiness.com).