

## Dobbs entrepreneur gets head start on Snip-its franchise

By David Maggiotto

There comes a time in most parents' lives when they must oversee their child's first haircut. Even for those who have trusted their own dexterity to trim a toddler's hair, that coming-of-age rite that seems to mark the end of babyhood calls for the trained hands of a professional. A few years ago Dobbs Ferry resident Jennifer Solomon discovered that there were no salons in the area specializing in children's haircuts. She did some online research and came upon Snip-its, a styling and hair product franchise designed specifically for kids. Solomon was so impressed with the idea that she decided to open a Snip-its of her own.

She purchased franchise rights for all future Snip-its locations in Westchester in 2005, and in 2007 opened her first salon in Cortlandt. Today (Nov. 14), Solomon will unveil her second Snip-its location, an 1800-square-foot salon at 450 Central Avenue, in the Scarsdale Park Mall.

"Snip-its is just such a fabulous place, unlike anything I had ever seen before," Solomon said. All of Snip-its' 60-plus salons nationwide follow the same visual motif: a large fiberglass arch festooned with the corporation's branded cartoon characters (a blue, comb-shaped fellow named Curly Comb; a sassy lady called Maranga Mirror) welcomes patrons into the shop. Colorful cutting stations are spaciously laid out, and most Snip-its have a private room in the back for birthday parties.

"We do a good job of cutting hair, but our goal is to turn a tedious chore into a fun-filled adventure," said Joanna Meiseles, founder of the Snip-its Corp. Since the first Snip-its opened in 1995, the franchise has grown to include more than 60 salons and a line of hair products for kids.

The successful company is an enterprise that would make the business sensors of a person like Solomon tingle. With a Wharton School MBA, Solomon embarked on a career on Wall Street as an equity analyst specializing in the beverage industry. The demands of the job were intense, and after the birth of her second child she began seriously thinking about a career change.

"I always wanted to own my own business," she said, "and with kids the

flexibility really works well." After browsing the company's Web site in 2005, Solomon packed up her kids — Abigail, now 6, and Elizabeth, 4 — and drove to the Snip-its headquarters outside of Boston. She met with Meiseles and other upper-level management, and eventually Solomon signed a contract to become the sole owner of the Snip-its franchise rights in Westchester.

The business venture seemed like a good bet on multiple levels for Solomon. While she saw the potential for profit, she also noted that "it was important for me to do something that I believed in and would add something to the community." A particular interest in hairstyling was not a driving force in Solomon's decision to open a Snip-its franchise. "I couldn't possibly know less about hair," she said. "I actually bought 'Hair-Styling for Dummies' so I could learn the lingo to talk to the stylists."

Her location in Cortlandt averages more than 1,000 haircuts a month and hosts more birthday parties than any other Snip-its in the country. Despite its success the location was not what Solomon originally envisioned when she purchased the Westchester franchise rights. "I wanted to be on Central Avenue since day one," she said.

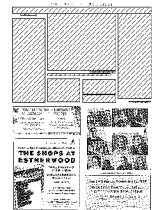
Her new Snip-its salon has six cutting stations and a large party room, which was essential. "We really take pride in our birthday parties," Solomon said. "It's a special day for kids, and you have to execute everything perfectly."

In addition to cake and goody-bags, a Snip-its birthday party includes giving girls fancy "up-do" hairstyles and dressing them in elaborate costumes for a fashion show. Boys might get their hair spiked

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

with colored gel and pirate costumes to wear. "In Cortlandt we often had parents who booked parties for their kids on the way out of another child's party," she said.

While the corporate headquarters maintains creative control over the look of each Snip-its, Solomon says she is given freedom with the design of the party rooms. She maintains that the corporation does not mandate many restrictions on their franchise owners. "They are giving you the right to represent their concept, and they understand that the owner of the marketplace best understands that particular market."



Her new location is open seven days a week and charges \$21.99 for a cut, though boys' buzz cuts cost a bit less. "Frankly the boys are the bread and butter because they need more cuts," Solomon pointed out.

Adults may get a trim at Snip-its as well, but only if they are accompanying a child. And unlike their young charges, grown-ups do not get to choose a prize from the magic box when their haircut is complete.



JIM MACLEAN/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Jennifer Solomon outside the location of her new Snip-its location on Central Avenue.