

The Buzz on Business

Entrepreneur gets head start on 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 Jennifer Solomon of Dobbs Ferry 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 decided to open a Snip-its of her own.

She bought franchise rights in 2005, and in 2007 opened her first salon in Cortlandt. On Nov. 14 she opened her second shop, an 1,800-square-foot salon at 450 Central Ave. in the Scarsdale Park Mall.

"Snip-its is just such a fabulous place, unlike anything I had ever seen before," Solomon said. All Snip-its salons have a large fiberglass arch festooned with the corporation's branded cartoon characters — a blue, comb-shaped fellow named Curly Comb and a sassy lady called Maranga Mirror. Colorful cutting stations are spaciouly 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 sa-

lons and a line of hair products for kids.

With a Wharton School M.B.A., 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 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. "I couldn't possibly know less about hair," she admitted. "I actually bought 'Hair-Styling for Dummies' so I could learn the lingo to talk to the stylists."

Her shop 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. "I wanted to be on Central

Avenue since Day 1," 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 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. "They are giving you the right to represent their concept, and they understand that the owner of the marketplace best understands that particular market," she said.

Her Central Avenue shop 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 said.

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 done.

Snip-its is at 450 Central Ave., call 574-5320.





SCARSDALE INQUIRER/JIM MACLEAN

Jennifer Solomon outside Snip-its on Central Avenue.

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