



YORK COUNTY

York County dry cleaner's local idea catching on

Zips began free cleaning for the unemployed

BY BRENT BURKEY
brentb@journalpub.com

The owners of a York County dry cleaning franchise have come up with an idea that is spreading.

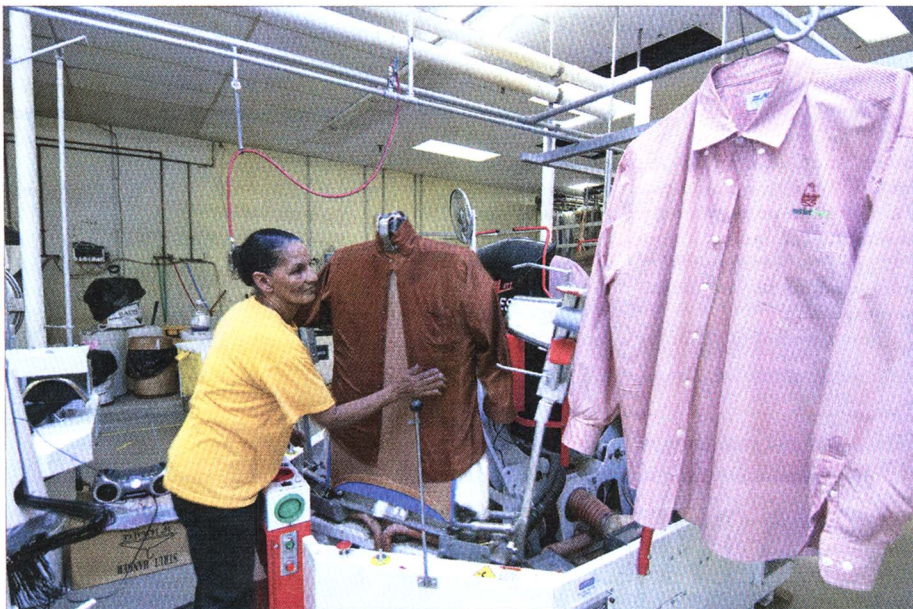
Zips Dry Cleaners in Springettsbury Township in 2008 began offering free dry cleaning for Pennsylvania state workers caught in the middle of tough budget negotiations, said Jill Wueschinski, owner and operator.

Many of them were customers she felt she needed to reach out to, Wueschinski said. About 30 people accepted her offer to clean 10 garments per week for free, she said.

Later, Wueschinski said, she decided to extend the program to anyone who was unemployed and looking for work. She offered to clean up to three garments a week for free to ensure people had clean interview suits.

About 10 people used the helping hand, with a few returning as paying customers after they landed a job, Wueschinski said. Many of the state workers who were not existing customers also returned.

"It was a neat relationship to build



PHOTO/AMY SPANGLER

Ana Crespo presses a shirt at Zips Dry Cleaners in Springettsbury Township. The York County franchise in 2008 began offering free dry cleaning for Pennsylvania state workers caught in the middle of tough budget negotiations.

with those customers," she said.

Others within the Greenbelt, Md.-based Zips franchise system found out about the free dry cleaning for people who were out of work. Leaders brought it up as an idea at a 2009 franchise own-

ers meeting, said Andy Cucchiara, vice president of franchise operations.

It's up to individual franchise owners to decide whether to offer the program, he said. The vast majority are either already doing it or will soon

start, he said.

Zips specializes in \$1.99 dry cleaning of any garment. There are 28 Zips franchises in the mid-Atlantic region, Cucchiara said.

Still, the company realizes it is dif-

"The worst thing that is going to happen is that you are going to help people out."

**Andy Cucchiara,
Zips Dry Cleaners**

ficult for people who are out of work to take businesses up on such offers, he said.

"The worst thing that is going to happen is that you are going to help people out," Cucchiara said.

Zips Dry Cleaners began in 1996 as eight businesses in the Baltimore-Washington region that were part of a larger company, he said. In 2002, the eight decided they might have a better business model in mind, and spun off into their own venture.

In 2006, Zips decided to expand through franchising. The York County location was the first, Cucchiara said. Zips operates in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

In the midstate, a new store opened Sept. 30 in East Hempfield Township, Lancaster County.

Owners Eva Stein and her son, Abram Fontana, were customers of the Zips in Springettsbury Township.

Stein said she most recently was online education dean for Central Pennsylvania College, and Fontana worked in real estate.

Her store, too, is offering free dry cleaning for the unemployed and is starting a program to clean uniforms of emergency responders for free, Stein said.

Customer response has been immense, Stein said, and the business is steadily growing.

Wueschinski was a software programmer for 12 years and lived in Annapolis, Md., before moving back to the midstate. She lives in Springfield Township.

She said she always wanted a small business. "I made a big change," Wueschinski said.

Her franchise opened in November 2007.

Business at Zips has been growing in the recession, with new customers coming in every day, Wueschinski said. Sales this year are up about 3 percent to 4 percent compared with last year.

She said: "Everyone is looking to find ways to cut costs." ■