

● Bookkeeping Express Enterprises of McLean is raising \$1 million to open 50 franchise locations by 2012. **Page 10**

Accounting co. steps up East Coast visibility

By Tierney Plumb

Bookkeeping Express Enterprises LLC, a McLean-based accounting company for small businesses, is aggressively expanding, with plans to open at least 50 new franchise locations by 2012. To fund the growth, it is raising \$1 million from private investors. So far it has raised \$700,000.

Bookkeeping Express, which operates corporate-owned and franchised accounting offices, is taking advantage of increasing demand for certified outsourced accounting services due to new, complex federal regulations and a waning economy that has companies looking for cheaper alternatives to big-name accounting firms. Companies pay \$500 to \$1,000 per month for Bookkeeping's services.

Its target clients are small businesses that generate revenue in the \$100,000 to \$5 million range. The company currently has a presence in 14 states with 17 franchisees.

The franchise fee to start a Bookkeepers Express is \$30,000 and start-up costs range from \$50,000 to \$75,000. Bookkeepers are certified by the Rockville-based American Institute of Professional Bookkeepers.

The capital that comes from the fundraising will be used to open corporate business development locations, or sales offices, on the



CEO Greg Jones first bought into Bookkeeping Express with partners in 2007.

Photo by Joanne S. Lawton

East Coast. Each location sells the company's accounting services directly to the small business community. That tactic, said CEO Greg Jones, ideally leads to franchisees coming on board because of the buzz the local sales office builds around the brand.

"It's the hub-and-spoke concept," he said. "We open a corporate office, build a client base, PR campaign and energy around Bookkeeping Express. It brings interested parties in to join the system as a franchisee."

The company is looking to open its next corporate development offices in Philadelphia and Charlotte, and then one every other quarter for the next year.

The company is also expanding by outsourcing back-office accounting services.

In April it opened a service center in Boise, Idaho, that's "filled with CPAs, MBAs and all the way down to data-entry people," Jones said.

The center functions as an operations back office for franchisers that don't want to do their own accounting or bookkeeping.

"They are not good at accounting, but they are good at running a pizza shop," Jones said of a San Francisco pizza chain client. "Franchisers get great reports on their franchisees [by using the center]. It frees them up to do community relations and business development."

Bookkeeping Express is rolling out a marketing campaign to lure more companies to the center. Its 2011 goal is to have at least half a dozen franchisers in the system.

Bookkeeping Express was acquired in 2007 by Jones, a franchiser of five Five Guys Burgers and Fries in Florida, Merritt Green, a founder of McLean-based law firm General Counsel PC, and Bob Stocker, a former executive at Stocker Advisory Services in Bethesda.

They bought the company when it started to falter in California, revamped the business plan and moved it to McLean. The company generated \$789,000 in revenue in 2009 and is on track to generate \$1 million in 2010.

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