

## Move, or lose

Instead of letting a promising franchise opportunity get away, a Texas couple relocates—and finds even more than they bargained for

**W**hen Avery Walker got her MBA from the University of Houston, she never dreamed that her passion in life would involve hard hats and backhoes. In the midst of a financial career, Walker took a hiatus to raise her children. Twenty years later she was ready to get back to work, but since leaving the financial world she had developed an independent streak. The prospect of punching the corporate clock no longer appealed to her.

Instead, she and her husband, Marty, who had recently retired from the financial sector, looked around for investment opportunities. They found Volvo Rents, a franchise that rents and sells heavy equipment to construction companies and other businesses. The only problem was, the rental market at home in Austin was saturated.

So they packed up and moved to College Station, Texas, to open their business. It proved to be the right choice: While most of the construction industry has been in the doldrums the last few years, in College Station—home to Texas A&M University—work has been steady. Walker hit \$1.1 million in revenues in 2008, her first year in business, and \$4 million last year. —JASON DALEY



AVERY WALKER FORGED NEW GROUND FOR VOLVO RENTS.

### We've heard some of your equipment is pink. Why is that?

We painted a 65-foot boom pink and set it in front of the stadium for the A&M women's basketball charity game. It's very striking, and we rent it out to anyone who needs a 65-foot boom, so it gets hauled to various job sites around town. Once a driver who was sent to pick it up said, "I don't want to drive a truck with a pink boom on it." But when he came back he said people were smiling and waving and honking. We also did a smaller truck to support the Special Olympics. Hopefully our next one will be red, white and blue to support the troops.

### Was it difficult moving to set up a business?

No, we love the community we picked, and we're glad we didn't move into a larger area. Those areas are extremely competitive with other established rental companies. It's also harder to become a member of the community. We have really found a niche between the local mom and pops and the big-box stores.

### Why did you sour on corporate life?

In the corporate world, there are a lot of extraneous activities you have to participate in and a lot of other departments and goals you have to work with. You may not be able to head off in the direction you want. In my franchise, I can make decisions about what is best for my business and for me, whether that's purchasing equipment or opening another store. One week I might put in 60 hours and there might be another where I take more time to deal with family issues. I definitely work more than I did in a corporate job, but I have more control over our financial decisions.

### Any bumps along the way?

In the beginning, I bought some equipment that didn't get used. Fortunately, Volvo worked with us to sell it and to do swaps to acquire more equipment.

### Can you run a bulldozer yet?

I like using the smaller equipment, but I don't think you want me out there operating it for you.