

Owner franchising Christmas biz

BY PATRICK O'GRADY
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Jamie Limber has made a career out of holiday lights, and now he's franchising his St. Nick's Professional Decorators with the goal of creating a nationwide Christmas decoration company.

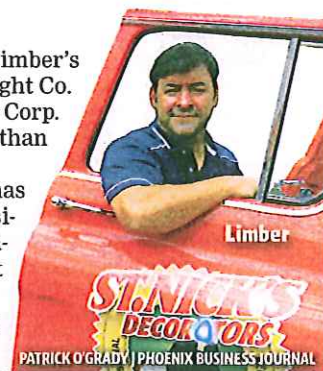
"There's certain services out there that people just don't do themselves," said Limber, the company's CEO. "Carpet cleaning is a good example. Ten or 20 years ago, people cleaned their carpets themselves. Now they hire a service. We

want to be like that."

Franchising a service has been Limber's goal since he sold the Christmas Light Co. in August 2008 to Dyno Merchandise Corp. in Pompano Beach, Fla., for more than \$5 million.

Limber is an old hand at Christmas decorations. He started his first business, the Christmas Lights Decorator, in 1989 and sold it in 2003 after it

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DECORATIONS: Entrepreneur hopes to have 500 franchises nationwide within five years

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became the largest custom Christmas decorator in Arizona.

Now Limber has reached an agreement with Dyno to continue using the St. Nick's brand of lights — which have become a staple on the shelves of Home Depot, Lowe's and other stores — and hopes to parlay it into a nationwide franchise opportunity.

His goal is to have up to 500 U.S. franchises within five years.

To help him, Limber brought in Michael Vanderslice as chief operating officer. Vanderslice has experience setting up national call centers, which he did at Geeks on Call, and he has a history as an entrepreneur.

Limber's board of advisors also features two McDonald's Corp. veterans. Joe Beckwith was the fast-food giant's vice president of operations and spent 35 years with the company, and Shelby Yastrow was with McDonald's for 25 years as lead counsel.

Dyno sees the partnership as a way to create a national brand in seasonal decorations where the market is large but very fragmented, said Jim Moynihan, president and CEO of Dyno.

"The concept of making this a national brand of products and services is one of the reasons I wanted to buy the brand," he said.

Building a brand under one banner has its appeal for those already in the business. Tony Snider, who has operated a decorating service in the Valley for 15 years, will be the first franchisee. He's looking at



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Jamie Limber, right, is CEO of St. Nick's Professional Decorators. His first franchisee is Tony Snider, left.

converting his 180 commercial and residential customers to St. Nick's.

"I wanted to take it to the next level," he said.

The challenge will be taking the decorating business to middle-income areas. Both Limber and Snider said the market has evolved from one that was primarily high-end homes and businesses to one that is more widespread.

"It's not as much of a luxury as it used to be," Snider said.

According to the International Franchise Association, franchises made up 8.1 percent of U.S. jobs in 2005, the most recent figures available.

The biggest challenge for franchisees is one that has wracked the economy: the inability to find financing in the past year. Despite that, IFA expects franchise startups to outpace other businesses again in 2009, said Alisa Harrison, vice president of communications and marketing.

St. Nick's goal is to target franchisees whose other businesses see a decline around the holidays. That could include painters and landscapers, Limber said.

ST. NICK'S PROFESSIONAL DECORATORS

CEO: Jamie Limber

HQ: Phoenix

FOUNDED: 2008

BUSINESS: Franchise outlet for Christmas decoration services

FRANCHISE COST: \$4,800 to \$8,500

PRICES: Residential installations are \$499 to \$1,499; commercial installations vary

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St. Nick's Professional Decorators: www.stnickdecor.com

Dyno Merchandise Corp.: www.dynomerchandise.com

International Franchise Association: www.franchise.org