

# A Franchisee Who's Given Warm Welcomes for 10 Years



**Entrepreneur** (June 2015) – Sonda Conk’s warm and welcoming personality was a natural fit when Our Town America first began franchising ten years ago; in fact, Conk grabbed the company’s first franchise, in Sarasota, Florida. She was already a sales rep for the company, which connects local businesses with people just moving into new communities. And before that, Conk had worked for two other welcome services. But in ten years, she hasn’t looked back. She praises Our Town’s great product and comprehensive franchisee training program.

## How long have you owned a franchise?

I actually purchased the first Our Town America franchise when they started franchising in 2005. I’m currently celebrating my 10-year anniversary, along with Our Town America’s franchise 10th anniversary. I can’t believe how fast these past years have gone. I just signed my renewal agreement for ten more years and I am eagerly looking forward to our next ten years together!

## Why franchising?

A good franchise is based on a successful business model, which Our Town America had had for over 30 years when I bought my franchise in 2005. One of the main

assets of owning a franchise like Our Town America is the flexibility of your time. I work smarter, not harder, so that I have time to spend with my family, take a vacation or even manage my own outside activities around my business appointments. The ability to be your own boss is such a valuable benefit of owning a franchise.

### What were you doing before you became a franchise owner?

I had worked for a welcome service, when I first moved to Sarasota, for about four years but got discouraged with their specific product. I left but continued in outside sales and marketing. Eventually, I began working for another well-known competitor, but soon discovered that yet another company had bought both welcome services and put the name of my recent employer on the one I had worked for previously.

Now I was selling the same thing I had sold years before, which was a disappointment. Timing is everything, and soon I had an opportunity to meet with Our Town America. I was so impressed with everything, from the product to the comprehensive franchise training program, that I started working as a sales representative right away. Better yet, my previous clients were just as impressed, so it didn't take much persuading to switch them over to Our Town America!

### Why did you choose this particular franchise?

Finding the right franchise is very important. However, because I was already working for Our Town America when they started franchising, I jumped at the opportunity and bought the first franchise. I knew it was already successful, and my clients were very happy with the response and service.

In fact, I have clients that have been with me for my whole 13-year tenure. One of the reasons I purchased an Our Town America franchise was that it's a recession-proof business. People are and always will be moving, and businesses are always looking to capture these new families. It proved to be the right decision during the Great Recession. My numbers went down, but the business was still profitable.

Today, real estate is booming and families are moving. My franchise is in Sarasota, Florida, and the boomers want to retire in the sunshine, so Our Town America welcomes them with our warm welcoming package and free offers from local businesses. I can honestly say it's been the best investment of my life.

**How much would you estimate you spent before you were officially open for business?**

As Our Town America's first franchisee ten years ago, I lucked out on the cost. I was able to purchase my franchise for around \$50,000. Because the Our Town America franchise model is home-based, I was able to avoid real estate/construction costs associated with opening a new business. It was a huge relief to not have to worry about build-outs, storefronts or inventory expenses.

I attended the training course and also learned the business operation side. When I returned home, I set up everything for the business to work out of my home. Years later, I invested in a small office and an administrative assistant to help lighten the load, but many [other] franchisees work from home.

**Where did you get most of your advice/do most of your research?**

Well, of course I worked with an attorney to get advice, but as I mentioned, having previously been in the industry, I knew what the issues were with welcoming services. To give business clients a good product that delivers real results, along with services and fair pricing, is key.

Our Town America is a respectable and appreciated service for both patrons and local businesses. The product is beautiful and unique. And, as our partnered businesses and years of data will demonstrate, both the results and the pricing are unbeatable. These truths helped me make my decision. The integrity and values of the company and of its president still hold true today.

**What were the most unexpected challenges of opening your franchise?**

Going from being a salesperson to a franchise owner and having to do everything myself, I found buying a franchise a wake-up call. Self-discipline and time management were the biggest challenges. There is always a learning process as new products and systems are introduced.

I was very challenged when the company was computerized. So, since my forte is selling, I hired an administrative assistant that could help with these types of things. That was a perfect solution: Delegate!

**What advice do you have for individuals who want to own their own franchise?**

Try to find a franchise in a field you are familiar with or, even better, can feel

excited and passionate about. I have owned two franchises. Both were very different. I once owned a bookstore franchise, which was a retail operation where my retail background and love of books were the main reasons I chose the franchise.

With Our Town America, I had experience selling a concept I felt passionate about, and because they had a good product I had already been selling for three years, it was an easy decision. Both businesses proved to be successful and have provided a good living as well as personal satisfaction.

Franchising is a wonderful step to having your own business without having to reinvent the wheel or go into a lifetime of debt. Believe in the company's model as well as its values. Do your due diligence. Talk to other franchise owners so you can make an informed decision that is right for you.

I have to say, the support team at Our Town America are always there for any issues I have. They have an investment in me as well as the investment I have in them, so they want me to be successful and happy. I can look back on my decision today and say it has been a win-win.

### What is next for you and your business?

Our Town America is always staying on top of how to better our products and services. Over the past decade, I have worked to help thousands of new movers adjust to their Florida community and feel welcomed in their new town.

In turn, I've helped many local businesses grow while keeping Our Town America an integral part of their marketing strategy. I'm looking forward to keeping that tradition alive, and implementing our new products throughout the next ten years!

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