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The Deal: Business familiarizes newcomers with community

One local business is building on its success in connecting new residents with area services and businesses.

After 12 years as a stay-at-home mom, Jane McElhaney and her husband, Tom, bought an Our Town America franchise in 2007 that served most of Charlotte. She had a sales background and liked that the company was family owned and focused on the community.

“Our Town welcomes new families to the area and introduces them to businesses in the community,” McElhaney said. “It’s a great way to reach out to new folks and make them feel comfortable in their new home and their new neighborhood.”

Our Town was started in 1972 by Michael Plummer, who owned a restaurant at the time. He found that offering pizza and hospitality to new residents built his customer base.

The company is now headquartered in Pinellas Park, Fla., where it has 60 employees and oversees 25 regional offices.

McElhaney said that Our Town America focuses on direct mailings that are targeted to new residents in specific zip codes. The mailers go out monthly and include one-time gift certificates to businesses within a few miles of the residence.

“The benefit to the business is every month we are driving new customers in the doors,” McElhaney said.

When the gift certificates are used, the information is tracked, which allows Our Town to keep records of which families are trying each business.

Our Town Charlotte has also expanded its targeted marketing program to include postcards mailed to specific groups. For example, the company recently sent a color postcard for a children’s shoe store to households with children in a certain age group.

In 2011, McElhaney bought out the other Our Town franchise in Charlotte, which covered south Charlotte and the surrounding areas. She doubled her business and now covers all of Charlotte. She is expanding into the Lake Norman and Concord/Kannapolis areas.

She works with national and local businesses, including Chick-Fil-A, and local businesses such as Artisans Salon in Fort Mill and Indian Land Animal Hospital, which has worked with Our Town America for five years.

Indian Land Animal Hospital owners Lisa Shaw and David Grindstaff began working with McElhaney soon after opening five years ago, and the practice has been so successful that Shaw and Grindstaff have opened another business: Continental Boarding in southwest Charlotte.

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