

Crowning Touch Senior Moving Services Plans to Open Franchise

Linda Balentine has a vision. She wants to see her moving business expand into the national market. The plans are currently in the works for a second Crowning Touch Senior Moving Services to open in North Carolina. Her goal for her expanding company is to open five new franchises in the next year. Balentine has certainly come a long way since eight years ago when she took an idea she had formulated for a floundering moving business and parlayed it into a unique and thriving moving business.

Balentine was a single mother who needed flexible hours when she was approached by a moving business to develop an idea that would stimulate their business. She doesn't remember what inspired the idea but she does know it was a good one.

She explains, "I sat down and tried to come up with an idea for their moving business and I came up with this one. I spent four months doing research during which time they paid me. I met with directors of retirement communities. In other words, I came up with the idea then put substance to it by doing the research to see if it was a viable concept. The way I did that was to meet with everybody all over town who had anything to do with seniors. They were very generous. The same people who are still in those seats today helped me get started."

When she first started her senior moving company, the entire operation was ran out of her garage. She recalls, "I was the only employee and I did everything." She printed up her own promotional materials and was her own salesperson. She was on every move for the first three years plus of her operation and would drive the moving truck. She hired her first



Linda Ballentine of Crowning Touch Senior Moving Services

employees from the basketball courts of First Baptist Church. "We've always looked for quality in employees," Balentine says. "Drug free, hard working guys with a good work ethic and I found them there. One of those guys stayed with me for six years."

The first full-time employee was another women who helped with the packing. In the true entrepreneurial spirit of the small businessperson, Ballentine traded the rental of a duplex she owned for part of the employee's salary. In the beginning, Balentine needed her customers to pay her cash before the move.

There are various elements of the business that makes Crowning Touch a unique moving service. She explains, "There's not another company like this that offers estate purchasing, the types of storage and housecleaning after the move that we offer, and then goes ahead and has a UPS and package sales within their day-to-day operation. One of the things that makes it so fun to roll this out is that it really is new and unique. The fact that it is being debuted in Roanoke is a real neat thing."

Balentine purchased the new headquarters on Williamson Road in the fall of 2003. The new building

houses her moving operation, storage, estate store, and shipping and handling business. She currently has 14 employees, both full-time and part-time.

Another of the unique features Crowning Touch offers its patrons is its downsizing operation. Balentine explains, "This is one of the things that makes us totally unique. We are the only moving company in the state of Virginia that does computerized floor plans." The first step of the process is meeting with the clients to make up a wish list of items they want to move into their new homes. She then takes complete measurements of the new living quarters as well as noting such information as where the television and Internet cables are, where electrical outlets are located, and measurements of the closet floor space. She enters these facts and figures into a computer to create a personalized floor plan. The floor plan allows the client to see how their existing furniture will fit into their new living spaces. The service can be a wonderful stress reliever to seniors who are already facing many stresses created by the relocation.

Balentine has been working with the Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center for many years. Her business counselor is RRSBDC Executive Director Roy Baldwin. "They (the SBDC) really were a great encouragement and a great sounding board which is an important thing when you've got ideas that you want to run by experienced people," Balentine says.

For more information on Crowning Touch, call (540) 982-5800, or visit the estate store and corporate headquarters located at 6704 Williamson Road. The web site is www.crowningtouchUSA.com