

Up Front..

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It's a lousey job, but people pick it

By Staff

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Before she found her calling as a nitpicker, Dawn Mucci-Gooch was a garbage truck driver, followed by a brief career as an aromatherapy specialist.

"I've always had the entrepreneurial spirit," the 37-year-old Canadian franchisor of the Lice Squad says. "I don't go against the grain, but I'm not a traditionalist."

Mucci-Gooch's moniker is more suited for a handbag company, she quips, but she's making a name for herself helping schools and families rid themselves of head lice, a condition that while fairly common, still carries a stigma.

"I was always the kid that got sent home (from school)," she says. "It becomes a nightmare. I had so many pesticides poured on my head...and the comb tore out my long blonde hair."

When she struggled as a young mother with her children's head lice, she couldn't find anyone to help eliminate the pests. Long after the last of the eggs had been combed out of their hair, "I thought I'd pay anything to get help," she said.

Mucci-Gooch researched the problem which affects about 1.2 million Canadians and 4 million Americans every year, and discovered there's no quick fix. "You have to be persistent and diligent," she says. Head lice—"blood-sucking parasites that live only on people's hair," according to NPR's Your Health column—cause U.S. children to miss an estimated 12 million to 24 million school days annually. All because once the lice are removed, there's still the eggs, or nits, left behind to hatch.

Mucci-Gooch created a nit-picking system using pesticide-free products, followed by a specialized comb that speeds up the process. Her contractors—nurses, hairdressers and childcare providers, for the most part—charge \$55 an hour to treat and remove the lice.

She knew she had a replicable business model when her contractors wanted to do it for themselves, she says. Lice Squad began franchising in Canada six years ago. The franchise fee is \$30,000, with no royalties or quotas. It's a home-based business that's designed for stay-at-home moms. There are currently 15 open, all in Canada. The U.S. is the next likely spot Mucci-Gooch will comb for franchisees, but she's more interested in quality than quantity.

"You have to be careful who you put on the bus," she says referring to her franchise, "or you'll spend the ride getting people off or reseating everyone."

Apparently she's as nitpicky about franchisees as she is about eradicating the stigma of head lice.



Getting rid of head lice, such as this blood-sucking rendition, has become the mission of a Canadian franchisor.



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