

# “Family-Friendly” Franchises Create Bond, Teach Valuable Life Lessons

By *Richelle Kerns*

For years, corporate types have tossed around the term “family friendly” in an effort to lure employees who want to strike a better balance between their work and personal lives. In the franchise sector, however, the term takes on a whole different meaning.

In the corporate world, family friendly is traditionally associated with companies that provide flexible hours, child-care benefits and are sympathetic to days missed due to chicken pox and other childhood illnesses. But in franchising, where long hours, hard work and stress are part and parcel of operating any type of business, family friendly has come instead to describe concepts that are either home-based with flexible hours, or conducive to the whole family operating together.

In fact, an increasing number of entrepreneurs are finding certain franchise concepts are capable of strengthening family ties.

## Designed for families

Bette Fetter, 49, actually founded a franchise with the needs of her own family in mind. In 1988, Fetter was a stay-at-home mom with a combined passion for art and motherhood. As a way to supplement the family income doing something she truly enjoyed, Fetter began giving drawing lessons to neighborhood children around her kitchen table.

## Young Rembrandts became an extension of Fetter's own family

As Fetter's following gradually increased, she hired additional teachers to hold drawing classes throughout the community using her proprietary step-by-step drawing method. Soon, a franchise concept named Young Rembrandts was born. Today, thousands of pre-school and elementary school-aged children participate, with franchises nationwide.

“The ebbs and flows of Young Rembrandts as a business naturally lines up with the needs of a family,” Fetter said. “Usually, the summer months are less busy, allowing more flexibility for family vacations and other activities when the kids are out of

school. The best part is that since starting Young Rembrandts 15 years ago, I've been able to be there for my children and still operate a successful business. Our franchise is the kind that allows for that balance, because you're not behind a counter or a desk 10 hours a day. You have control over your schedule, and your family life.”

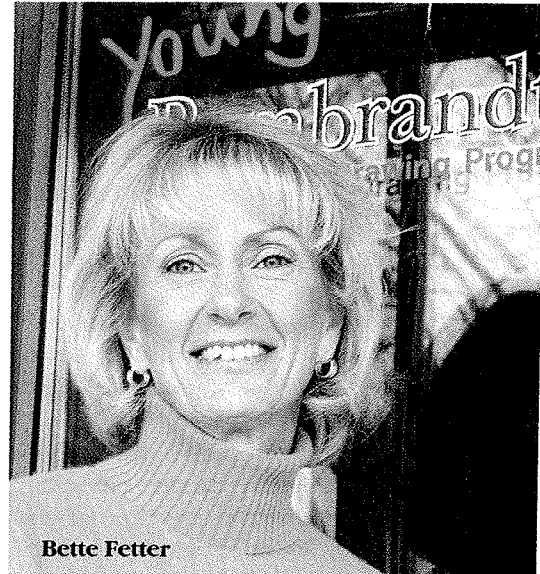
Eventually, Young Rembrandts became an extension of Fetter's own family. Her husband left his corporate job to join her in building the business.

“The skills he brought to the table from the corporate world have been a tremendous asset in building Young Rembrandts into a successful national franchise,” Fetter said. “I focus on the creative and curriculum development sides of the business, while he concentrates on seeing the bigger picture. In that sense, we're ideal business partners because we balance each other out.”

Approximately 90 percent of Young Rembrandts' franchisees are mothers who formerly held jobs in the corporate world, seeking more time to spend with their families. Lynne Turk, of Elgin, Ill., became a Young Rembrandts franchisee in 2002, after spending almost 20 years in the health services industry. Turk was inspired to start her own franchise by her three children's passion as participants in the art program.

“I had seen the positive impact of the program through my own children, and was impressed by the flexibility and work-from-home aspects of the concept,” said Turk, whose husband, a full-time computer systems analyst, handles the accounting and payroll aspects of the business for her. “I've been able to design my business to meet my family's needs, and at the same time demonstrate to my children the importance of good business ethics. Starting this franchise has been the best decision I could have made for my family. It's made such a positive difference.”

*(Continued on page 36)*



**Bette Fetter**

*(Continued from page 35)*

### **A perfect fit for franchise families**

While many family businesses result in family feuds, certain franchise concepts have become known for their family friendly operating structures that benefit both the business and the family relationships. Contours Express, a chain of women's fitness centers, is almost entirely made up of family-operated franchises.

Cheryl Tice, of Victorville, Calif., has found Contours Express to be a perfect fit for her family. Tice, who had been working in sales for more than 15 years, shares in the operation of the franchise with her husband and daughter. Her husband works mostly behind the scenes, handling finances and other operational task, while she and her 23-year-old daughter Allyson are up front with clients, often in alternating shifts. Cheryl Tice said knowing that her daughter is in the studio when she's not there is "added insurance"—it gives her peace of mind as a new business owner. In addition, the time she and Allyson have spent building up the business together has strengthened their relationship.

"For the first three months, Allyson and

I worked together almost 12 hours a day to get things up and running," Tice said. "Honestly, it has been the most wonderful bonding experience we could have had together. In three months, there was never a cross word between us, because we both shared the same goal in the same franchise that we both believed in. I would say Contours Express is definitely the ultimate family business because there's an important role to be played by every family member, and the hours are flexible enough for quality family time outside of the business."

### **A comforting move for the family**

Kerry and Trudy Hornick's Comfort Keepers franchise is based entirely on "family friendly" services, offering friendship and other non-medical services to aging adults, new mothers and others needing assistance in the Stark County, Ohio area. It also has been mutually beneficial for the family of nine and their clients.

"Since deciding to start a Comfort Keepers franchise, we have seen a significant improvement in our quality of life as a family," Hornick said. "We share memories and opportunities that we

never would have shared had we not gone into this business."

When the Hornicks became Comfort Keepers franchisees four years ago, their oldest daughter Chrystian, then 18, became their first employee to provide caregiving services to clients. Gradually, the couple's additional six children, now ranging in age from 10 to 21, became involved with the business. Today, four of their children are still actively involved, visiting clients with caregivers and participating in company-wide activities, such as baking holiday cookies for clients.

"Comfort Keepers allows us to put our family and our clients at the center of our business," Trudy Hornick said. "We have a lot of quality time together, but even more importantly, it helps our children understand what it means to go to work each day and earn money to feed your family and improve your lifestyle. They learned that firsthand through operating this franchise together, and it's the most valuable lesson they will carry through their entire lives." ■

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