

Chiropractic chain looks to open 18 sites in Charlotte

The Joint is headed by exec who led Massage Envy's rapid national expansion

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The Joint Corp. plans to open as many as 18 chiropractic clinics in the Charlotte area within five years.

And the first location here could open by year end — though a site has not been selected yet, says Paul Trindel of Greensboro, who owns the master franchise rights for North Carolina.

"We would very much like to get into Charlotte as soon as possible," he says.

Trindel expects to open 30 locations of across the state within five years. So

far, he has signed leases for two sites, in Greensboro and Raleigh.

The Tucson, Ariz.-based franchise markets itself as "The Joint... the chiropractic place." It got its start in 1999 with a focus on routine chiropractic care.

It differs from standard chiropractic practices because it streamlines how care is delivered. It relies on a membership model to promote routine visits.

That creates stability in the business and convenience for patients, says John Leonesio, chief executive of The Joint.

Leonesio was tapped in 2010 to spearhead the franchise chain's expansion, with the company noting his previous success in leading Massage Envy, another membership-based franchise.

Massage Envy has grown to more than 745 locations in 44 states, including more than a dozen sites in the Char-

lotte region.

"I'm not changing the way the doctor treats a patient," Leonesio says. "All we're doing is changing the way it's delivered. It's a lot more convenient, a lot more affordable."

The Joint clinics operate in shopping centers and other high-traffic locations. Patients are seen on a walk-in basis instead of needing — and waiting for — an appointment. Clinics are open until 7 p.m. on weekdays and offers weekend hours. That compares with more limited appointment times at most chiropractic practices.

The Joint does not rely on insurance payments. Rather, patients can pay a flat fee of \$29 per visit or sign up for a monthly membership that offers four chiropractic adjustments for \$49. That's often less expensive than copays for chiropractor visits.

The membership approach also allows customers to transfer between locations.

Leonesio estimates that The Joint's nationwide network will grow to 1,000 locations within eight years. It now has 203 sites across the country, with 385 more under development in 19 states.

Franchises cost between \$110,125 and \$167,825. Sites are selected in high-profile and high-traffic areas, such as near grocery stores. The average clinic measures 800 to 1,200 square feet.

Each location can accommodate up to 3,000 visits per month, with patients being treated for about 20 minutes per visit. That compares with about 600 at a standard chiropractic office, where visits last up to an hour.

Says Trindel: "Chiropractic really is becoming more and more part of people's wellness routines."

Nonprofit touts big local payoff from keeping kids in school

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Cutting the number of high-school dropouts at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has had an annual economic benefit of \$95 million, according to a recent study by Communities in Schools.

The Virginia-based nonprofit's report weighed the value of its efforts to keep at-risk kids in school through high-school graduation. It found that its approach increases the number of students who graduate on time, while also providing economic benefits for the communities it serves.

The economic benefit derives primar-

ily from the increased earning potential of students who graduate. But the study also factors in a reduced demand for social services, such as the costs of Medicaid or incarceration, because those students stayed in school.

In Charlotte, every dollar invested in the Communities in Schools program generates \$14.50 in economic benefit, according to the report. That exceeds the nationwide average of \$11.60.

It helps to be able to show that type of benefit at a time when school budgets are tight, says Mike Bento, Communities in Schools' executive vice president for marketing and communications.

Communities in Schools works with

more than 3,400 schools nationwide, including 44 elementary, middle and high schools locally. In the Charlotte area, the program serves more than 6,800 students, says May Johnston, community relations director of Communities in Schools of Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

The local program's budget for fiscal 2011-12 totaled nearly \$6.2 million. It received support from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools as well as county, state and federal funds and aid from area businesses and community groups such as United Way of Central Carolinas Inc.

About 1,500 local students drop out annually. The county's high school graduation rate was 74.5% for 2010-11. By com-

parison, 93% of the 669 seniors enrolled in the Communities in Schools of Charlotte-Mecklenburg program graduated during that period.

"Kids can rise to expectations, but they do have to feel someone believes in them," Johnston says.

Schools in Cabarrus and Gaston counties also participate in the Communities in Schools program, but those operations are primarily in the elementary and middle schools; the study focused primarily on high school graduation.

The annual economic benefit of the programs is nearly \$252,000 in Cabarrus and \$4.2 million in Gaston, the study says.



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