

## Success Salon Style

### *Dixie Inman loves the flexibility of her Great Clips Franchise*

By Suzanne Boles

Dixie Inman isn't a hairdresser but she knows a lot about running a hair salon. Inman, 52, originally apprenticed as a draftsman after high school, and then stayed home to raise her family. She says she was looking for something to do when her husband, Vaughn, an engineer in the pipeline industry, took a job that moved them to Malaysia for four years.

"While we were there I realized I really needed to do something. I was getting pretty bored so we started looking around for a business that I could do...We started to think about getting into a business that would provide residual income. Great Clips just ended up falling into our lap."

Great Clips is a hair salon franchise, established in 1982 in Minneapolis. In 2006 the company was named one of the top 20 fastest growing franchises by *Entrepreneur* magazine. They currently have over 2,600 salons in Canada and the U.S. making them the largest single-brand salon in North America.

Inman says they looked at a few different franchise opportunities. Then Great Clips was advertising for franchisees. Vaughn attended a meeting and Inman decided she found what she was looking for.

"I've never been a hairdresser. I don't know anything about it," she says candidly. But "People always need a haircut so it's a good repeat business."

In 1996 she bought the three salons, opening her first location in the summer of 1997. Within eight months she had three salons. Three other salons were purchased from franchisees. One of the salons was later closed and Inman opened another one at a different location. In total, she now owns six locations in Calgary.

Inman says her day has "changed significantly," since she first started up. Like any new business there were long hours and lots of work, but it's paid off. Two years ago she brought on a business administration graduate as her general manager to look after business operations, payroll and some of the accounting.

Instead of working on daily schedules, Inman now works on business cycles and has her routine down to a fine art.

"Every day I check the numbers from the previous day – average volume and wait time. I have a routine set up by the week as opposed to by the day. So every second Monday is payroll week."

She delivers pay to all six stores and visits with each manager. General office work and accounting are handled on alternate Mondays.

The main focus is on peak cycles – Easter/Spring break, end of school in June, back to school at the end of August and early September, and Christmas. The focus during these times is on staffing, scheduling and product orders to keep up with these busy seasons.

She enjoys the human resources aspect of her job; working with staff and managers. They have 60 hairdressers, all women.

"One of the things that I had read once (is that), typically, white collar workers bring their jobs home with them and blue collar workers bring their home life to work. That was an epiphany for me because we were always having personal issues in the salon with hairdressers."

Four years ago she hired a counselor, on retainer, to help staff with personal issues. All counseling is confidential and many of the staff have taken advantage of the assistance provided. For example, one employee has a handicapped son but was not claiming this on her income tax. The counselor helped her get that on track. Some staff have found themselves in crisis situations and used counseling for support to get through difficult times in their personal lives. The result has had an impact on the business.

Inman loves the flexibility of her job. Initially, she tried to do work in an office at one of the stores "but it was just a distraction for the staff and myself," so she decided to set up a home office. The bonus was that she was able to be home after school for her kids.

Technology has also made her job easier. "If I have a cell phone, a laptop and internet accessibility I can do my job pretty well from anywhere in the world."

She gives an example of when the family was on spring break in Porta Vallarta.

"It was payroll week, so I went to the little internet café with my laptop and ordered a Margareta and I downloaded the payroll information, and got it printed off, and I opened the paperwork and submitted it all. I pressed the bottom and it was delivered to Calgary and I had one of the staff deliver it to the stores."

Asked what qualities she feels a franchisee needs for success she says "patience" and "multi tasking – being able to strategize what we need to do and how to do it. What are our priorities because there's a lot to be done?" Other assets include good organizational skills, marketing ability, some knowledge of accounting (which Inman outsources) and basic business abilities. "And I really think you have to be a people person," she adds.

Inman says the benefits of the franchise system are franchisee training and support.

"There's always someone to answer questions on how to market, how to set up your computer system." And "buying a franchise system you're not reinventing the wheel. You have consistent experience in Calgary as well as Atlanta, Georgia."

The biggest challenge has been staffing, and that may be due to location. Calgary has a plethora of jobs and not enough able people to fill the positions. Some of that has tapered off a bit now though, says Inman.

Asked what she likes most about the business she answers without hesitation. "I really like the people. I love the staff. I love the idea of being in my own business."

For Inman the magic of the business comes alive when she goes into a salon on a Saturday and sees it running "like clockwork; the buzz of the customers and stylists." And, she laughs, "there is the highlight about sitting in Mexico having a Margareta," and still being able to do your job.

