

Deck The Walls franchisee Ebling buys parent company

Moving headquarters here; gets backing of Bush O'Donnell

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A deal estimated at about \$10 million will bring the franchise headquarters of retail art and custom framing stores Deck The Walls and The Great Frame Up to St. Louis by the end of summer.

Mark Ebling, a franchisee with Franchise Concepts Inc. (FCI) for more than 18 years, put together the deal with Clayton-based investment firm Bush O'Donnell Capital Partners and C3 Capital Partners, a Kansas City-based small-business investment company.

"Mark approached us in June 2003 with the proposal to buy the company (FCI)

and wanted to see if we would back him from a financial stand point," said Scott Fesler, a principal with Bush O'Donnell. "We respected his ability in the industry and decided it was something we wanted to do."

Houston-based FCI had combined sales of \$80 million in 2003.

Ebling will serve as FCI's president and chief executive. Jim O'Donnell, co-founder and president of Bush O'Donnell, will be the chairman of the FCI board. Bush O'Donnell is the largest shareholder in the new ownership group with an investment of between \$3 million and \$4 million, Fesler said. Fesler and Pat Healy of C3 also will sit on the board.

The new headquarters will be located in Clayton, and 15 people will be hired to staff it.

While financial terms of the sale were not disclosed, Debbie Douglas, president

of The Douglas Group, a private investment banking firm that specializes exclusively in the buying and selling of companies, estimated the value of the transaction at \$10 million or less.

"This is not an enormous deal. Franchisers are often reticent about disclosing information because they don't want franchisees to use it in negotiations with them. But they do provide important services, like group buying power and marketing, to the franchisees," Douglas said.

Ebling, who could not be reached for comment, said in a statement that the new ownership of FCI will provide more capital for marketing and merchandising.

The Great Frame Up, founded in 1971, has six locations in the St. Louis area and 152 nationally.

Deck The Walls, which began in 1979 as Frame It, and was renamed in 1983, also has six stores in the St. Louis area and 122 nationally.



Mark Ebling

