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## The Second Store Phenomenon

When Rockville, MD, started inviting retailers to open shop in its newly revamped Rockville Town Center, Lynne Benzion, associate director for Rockville Economic Development, began noticing a trend, what she calls the "second store phenomenon." • "We didn't want it to be all national chain stores," Benzion says. "We wanted someone to be able to look around at the retail mix and say, 'must be Rockville.' We wanted unique, regional stores." • Regional, yes, but many are not unique. Alongside the public library that anchors the 15-acre town center, business owners setting up shop for the second time flocked to its 180,000 square feet of retail space. • *SmartCEO* spoke with three "second-store" owners to find out how they made the leap that doubled their business presence.

### LOCATION, PEOPLE AND GUTS

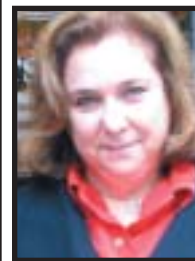
Rockville might not immediately seem the most logical choice for a trendy New York City sushi bar's second location, but to **Karyl Chong**, it was more than a business choice. "If I were thinking just business, I would have opened my second store in SoHo, but I have children," she says. "The only time I saw my son was when he was sleeping. We were ready to open a second location, but if we did that in New York City, I'd lose touch with my family."



Chong says after seven years in New York, she and her husband knew the timing was right to open a second Sushi Damo. "When you open your first restaurant, you are juggling 10 different balls. It's exciting, but you're never satisfied," she says. "In New York, I finally felt like I was juggling three balls and that gave me time to look around and to feel comfortable. It's like when you are learning a new piece of music: you enjoy playing the piece and perfecting the piece, and once you have mastered it, now you can go on to the next sonata or concerto."

So Chong began scouting out a family-friendly location and found her match in Rockville. But for Chong, location is just one part of the equation for success. "If you want to open another location, it takes location, people and guts. Those are the three things. You can have everything going for you, but if you don't have the guts, you will lose that sliver of opportunity. In another seven years, we'll go for another location."

### A BIGGER AUDIENCE



It may have taken **Joan Barmat** 14 years to perfect her mix of dishware, bed linens, furniture and fine stationary at her Bedheaders store in Great Falls, VA, but once she got the formula right, it was time to widen her reach.

"In Great Falls there are a lot of big houses on big properties — not a lot of people. I wanted a bigger audience, so I took it on the road," says Barmat, who opened her Rockville store in July. "I grew up in Potomac, so when Rockville said it was building a town center, I thought it was a good idea."

Barmat opened her first store after 20 years of investment banking in New York. "I realized that I had an over-decorated New York apartment," she says. "I thought, 'I should get to doing what I love before it's too late.'"

She began by selling bed hangings modeled after those she saw while staying at fine hotels in Geneva and San Francisco. But the mix wasn't immediately profitable. "The shop became a showroom," she says. "It was not something that everyone wants or that they would give me money for, so I added soaps and accessories." When Bedheaders added dishes and dining items, it became the go-to place for hostess gifts.

While adding another store leaves Barmat feeling a bit stretched at times, she is beginning to realize the economic benefits.

"It is easier to manage the inventory with two stores because you can buy greater quantities from the wholesalers and divide it between the stores and have more back and forth," Barmat says. "The big bucks in this business is the inventory and there is a fair amount of overlap."

## THE SECOND SECOND STORE

Technically, **Kennedy Casperone's** Primo Italiano in Rockville is her *second* second store. Her first foray into expanding her father's Reston deli was a 400-square-foot satellite location in a Reston ice skating rink.

"The owner of the rink started making demands, like being open for coffee in the morning or staying open late at night. I wanted a business where I could set my own hours," Casperone says. So when the Rockville opportunity presented itself, she took it.

"I wouldn't have opened a store except that I had faith in my father's store and knew he had a great product," she says.

Having a great product as a model did not mean that the expansion was without obstacles. "We thought everything would translate, but found out that people here like different things," she says. "This is a salad area. Reston was more meat. The prime rib didn't sell well. In Reston, we called out your ticket number. That didn't work here, so instead we give you a table number. We tried to keep it the old way but it was beating a dead horse."

Casperone says that she will buy out her father's Reston location in the next few years, but don't expect to see a chain of Primo Italianos anytime soon. For Casperone, two stores are enough. "If you expand too much, you lose that personal touch," she says. "You just have to be there."



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