

BUSINESS SUNDAY

Expanding salon has some hair-raising moments

When Nick Penna and his sister Laura Shaw started talking seriously a couple of years ago about expanding their business, SalonCapri, they did not anticipate the upheaval that was about to hit the economy.

They were bursting at the seams of their Newton location and wanted more space. After



SMALL BUSINESS MATTERS
Jennifer HELDT POWELL

scouting locations all around the area, they settled on Legacy Place in Dedham, a new retail development intended to look more like a neighborhood than a traditional mall.

There were some concerns. Regardless of appearance, it is a mall, which means being open longer hours and on more days than is typical for salons. Also, SalonCapri is not a chain and its owners debated whether it would fit in.

Overall, however, Penna and Shaw liked the area and the development's potential.

"Here was this area that needed something like this, and it's really exciting," Penna said. "It's really new, and that is what attracted us."

Somewhere along the way, they noticed that customers were taking longer between appointments and scaling back services. News reports confirmed that the economy was



HERALD PHOTO BY FAITH NINIVAGGI

CUT ABOVE: SalonCapri's co-owner Nick Penna cuts a client's hair at a new shop at Legacy Place in Dedham. While Penna worried about expanding into a mall, business is going well thus far.

slowing down.

Maybe if they had not been already so far along, they might have stopped or pushed things off to watch the economy. But they were already committed.

"Also, I'm an optimist," Penna said. "I felt there was nowhere to go but up."

Penna is more interested in the artistry than the business end of hair dressing, but he understands how closely the two must be balanced. He grew up in the business watching his parents running a salon in Hyde Park.

As a teenager, he resisted the

call of the business, thinking instead about fashion and arts. Still, at 19, he went to hair school.

He eventually joined his parents at their salon before branching out with his sister to open the Newton shop.

The recession made the ex-

pansion more difficult than expected. Not surprisingly, it was harder to get a loan despite the company's many years in business. Plus, there was the ongoing, nagging question of how far the economy would fall and how long the recession would last.

The upside was that there were a few more bargains to be had on the construction side, and it was a little easier to find managers for the new location.

With the bigger space and the longer hours, the staff had to be more than doubled. In Newton, there were 26 employees. The total is now more than 64. Since Penna and Shaw wanted the Dedham location to mirror the Newton shop, they needed employees to know the environment there. That meant starting the hiring process even before the new shop opened.

The Dedham store finally opened with the appropriate fanfare a month ago. So far, it seems to fit in just fine. Penna said that despite his concerns, customers seem to like the longer hours and the salon is busier than anticipated during those times.

The biggest difference for Penna has been the loss of downtime he had before launching the expansion — those short breaks in between clients when he didn't have to think about contractors, new hires and other logistics.

"It's wearing, but you have to think about the future," he said.

— jpowell@excellentwriters.com

