

S T A R T U P S

Franchisee takes a stress-free path to success

Want to get stoned and rubbed all over? Get your mind out of the gutter. Coming soon to Long Island will be new, high-end massage facilities, as three Hand & Stone Massage Spa franchises are slated to open to work out the kinks, stresses and strains of Island life.

Debra Cuadra, who owns development rights from New Jersey-based Hand & Stone for Nassau and Suffolk counties and eight counties in New Jersey, plans to open her own spa in Jericho. Last week she was in the process of finalizing the sale of two other franchises. This is not the first franchise rodeo for Cuadra who, after working in marketing and sales for a subsidiary of Eastman Kodak and the Daily News, spent 18 years as an owner and operator of eight McDonald's franchises in Brooklyn and Queens.

Looking for a third career, she made the choice to get back into franchising because "it's a safer alternative than being in an independent business," Cuadra said.

She also wanted to go into the wellness industry because "it has fewer moving parts than the food industry," she added. "There are fewer regulations and you don't have to

deal with food and the public issues."

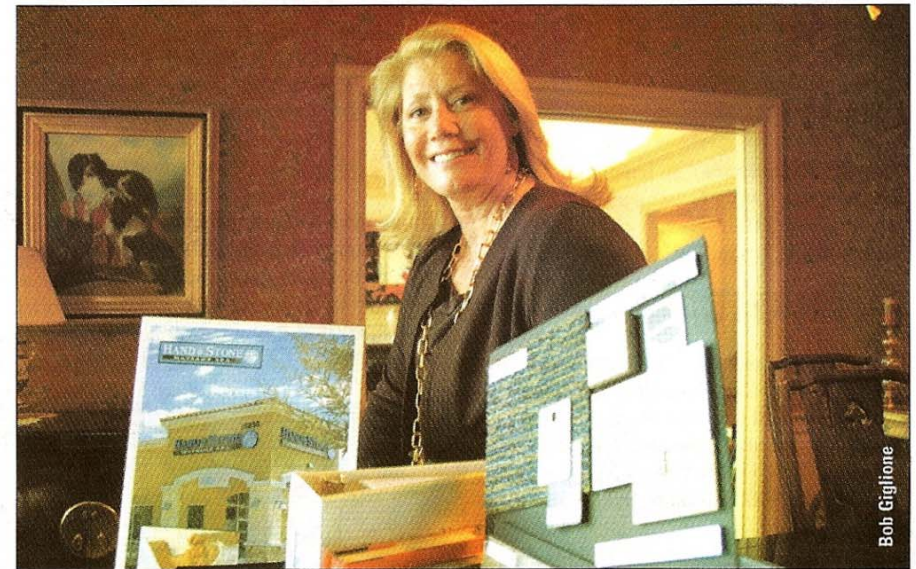
Another advantage of a Hand & Stone franchise rather than something in the food industry is professionals staff the business, sparing owners from managing high school kids. Plus landlords "love the concept because it's an easy and upscale use," Cuadra said. "We're a spa, not a clinic, even though massage is therapeutic."

Cuadra believes she's riding a wave after she monitored the industry and watched the expansion, she said. She may be right. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, employment for massage therapists is expected to increase 18 to 26 percent by 2014, due to "increased interest in alternative medicine and holistic healing ... Healthcare providers and medical insurance companies are beginning to recognize massage therapy as a legitimate treatment and preventative measure."

Hand & Stone will offer an introductory, 50-minute massage for \$39.95 and then seek to sign up members for \$59.95 a month which includes a 50-minute massage, lower rates for additional sessions and discounts on products. Upgrades to \$79.95 include a hot stone massage and other add-ons, such as a hot towel exfoliation.

Also, Cuadra said the gift card selections are big moneymakers in every spa.

Franchise Solutions, a company which tracks franchises nationally, reports that investment in a Hand & Stone operation



Bob Gigliore

Debra Cuadra plans to open three Hand & Stone Massage Spa franchises on Long Island.

can run as high as \$387,000.

Cuadra said the investment includes a \$39,000 franchise fee and the remainder goes towards build-out of the spa, rent, security deposits, utilities and working capital. "That's soup to nuts, from buying the franchise to opening the door," she said.

Tom Scarda, owner of FranChoice, consultants and coaches to franchise owners, said Hand & Stone has a good shot of prospering even in a down economy. He noted the primary market for the spas "are the

folks who enjoy modest guilty pleasures" and the franchises "are ensuring with competitive rates that a relaxing massage can still be justified."

Educating your market that you exist is the number one priority. Cuadra is marketing her franchise through print advertising and by holding seminars at various Island locations, she said.

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