



Photo by Nicholas Griner, Staff

Carroll County sports apparel retailer HomeGamers'™ growth is no game

by Ryan Sharrow, Staff

Friday, October 9, 2009 – A Carroll County retailer is banking on sports-crazed fans to fuel an expansion of his sporting goods and home furniture store in major-league cities along the East Coast.

HomeGamers, which opened its first store in Westminster in 2006, hired Annapolis' Franchise Group to scout potential franchisee opportunities. The retailer's first franchised location opened at Waldorf's St. Charles Towne Center in late September and caters to Washington Redskins and Capitals fans. Now Jeff Hinton and Marc Heyman, owners of HomeGamers, want to open at least six additional franchised locations in towns and cities surrounded by major-league sports.

Hinton said he has received interest from potential franchisees in Philadelphia and Atlanta. The company has a license for states along the East Coast. The Westminster store sells sports-centric items that include Joe Flacco jerseys, pool tables and a \$3,500 1960 refurbished Ravens-themed vending machine. Sales have climbed 20 percent since opening in 2006, Hinton said, who declined to disclose revenue figures.

"There is no recession in licensed sports apparel," he said. "And when your team is doing better, it's through the roof." A HomeGamers franchise costs between \$244,500 and \$456,000, depending on the size. The TownMall in Westminster store is 9,500 square feet, while the Waldorf location is 6,500 square feet.

New business through franchising was expected to drop 1.2 percent in 2009 as a result of the credit crunch, according to a PricewaterhouseCoopers report. The \$835 billion U.S. franchising market typically doesn't decline as rapidly as other industries during a recession as laid off workers consider going into business for themselves, industry experts say. Franchising is also attractive because a business model is already in place and the franchise owner has support from someone else. But the issue of securing needed financing remains an issue, said John Fawkes, membership manager for the International Franchise Association in Washington, D.C. "With every business there's a risk," said Fawkes, who encourages any interested franchisee to complete wide research before committing. "Just because someone else is successful doesn't mean you'll be successful."