

# BABY STEPS for new franchisees

## INNOVATIVE APPROACH WINS NEW PARENTS ESQUIRES COFFEE HOUSES' TOP AWARD

⇒ Starting a new business is always an exciting time, especially when you've chosen an industry that you've never worked in before. As our cover story shows, working with your spouse for the first time can add to the excitement and the challenges. But if that isn't enough, add a brand new baby to the mix and see what happens!

In the case of Gary and Michelle Macilwee, it was a recipe for success. The couple opened their Esquires Coffee Houses franchise in Tauranga's Bayfair Mall just before Christmas 2007 and baby Sean was born just seven months later. Despite this considerable distraction, they won Esquires' *Customer Service* and *First Year Excellence* awards in 2008 and then the overall *Esquires Franchise of the Year* title in 2009. It's been a huge learning curve for the couple, who had never worked in the hospitality industry before, let alone owned their own business. Gary's background is in retail and Michelle's in administration. And neither had been parents before, either...

'It might sound crazy but actually it really worked,' Gary says, looking back. 'We chose a café business because we felt that would really suit our strengths in customer service and organisation, then a franchise because they could provide the expertise we lacked. The fact that the banks are more interested in supporting a good franchise was important, too. Then I interviewed a few franchisors and Esquires stood out. The team there understand that franchisees are in business to make money too. They have a deep understanding of the intricacies of the business themselves as they spent a couple of years perfecting the system before opening the franchise up. All that gave us confidence that we would make it work – and we have.'

### PRAM MARKETING

Gary admits, though, that the first year was uphill work. 'We had two of the Esquires team on site at first to help us get comfortable, but there comes a point at which you say "Right, this is *our* business and it's up to *us* to make it work." In the first year I was thoroughly enjoying myself, working very hard, but not really making much money, if I'm honest. That's part of getting established, of course. We worked hard on getting visitors to become regulars and turn customers into fans. When the recession kicked in and foot traffic into malls dropped, those efforts paid off and we found lots of little ways to promote ourselves.'

And, of course, Gary and Michelle had a secret weapon – baby Sean. The 'Esquires baby' proved to be a marketing coup from day one. 'I would put Sean in his pram with loads of vouchers and take him round the area getting to know everyone,' Gary laughs. 'It was a great success – it really got our name out there and helped us establish ourselves with staff and



MICHELLE AND GARY MACILWEE OF ESQUIRES BAYFAIR RECEIVE THEIR AWARDS FROM LEWIS DEEKS - ESQUIRES NZ CEO (LEFT)

regulars in the mall. We were quite overwhelmed by the reception he got, and even presents - two regular customers are in the local spinners and weavers club and they produced a matching jumper and hat for him.'

Sean's efforts – and those of his parents – paid off. At the recent awards, Gary and Michelle were commended for 'their uncompromising approach to delivering excellence in customer service, their energetic fresh approach, pristine store appearance and year-on-year sales increases in excess of 40%.'

'Turnover now is way exceeding my original projections,' Gary grins. 'I think we learned a lot from that first year. There are two keys to this business: the first is getting really good people on board, and the second is learning to delegate. With a seven day business you need lots of staff, and if you treat them well they begin to gel. People appreciate being trusted with jobs, and it is essential to do so. At the same time, there's a fine balance between working too hard and not hard enough. In the first year I wanted to do everything. In retrospect, I should have taken a day off a week from the start and I'd have been better for it. Now we have a manager so I only do four days a week there myself and I've joined a running club to get some time out. It's made a huge difference. But we're not stopping now! Esquires is a very good business and we have our war-chest started, ready to buy a second one...'

### MORE OPPORTUNITIES

A new Esquires Coffee Houses franchise requires an investment of approximately \$250-450,000 plus a \$75,000 franchise fee depending on the type of store. The company has opened 45 outlets in New Zealand since 2002 and has been a leader in developing community relationships. Wi-fi access has made Esquires a popular stop-off and the franchise was the first in New Zealand to serve Fair Trade organic coffee as their house blend. Food is prepared off-site, reducing the need for large stores with specialist staff and equipment while offering customers an attractive and varied menu.

'As Gary and Michelle and many of our other franchisees have proven, hospitality experience isn't essential,' says NZ CEO Lewis Deeks. 'Vision, determination and a commitment to providing a good customer experience are all you need. We have available locations throughout the country, so call us now!' ■

### ADVERTISER INFO

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