

# CANADIAN **Business**



## Definitive Children's Services Franchise Guide



By Peter Saunders

**A**s the Toronto-based president of Tutor Doctor, Frank Milner has taken a Canadian business and expanded it both at home and abroad. He first learned about the in-home, private tutoring concept in 2007 from its founder, John Hooi, and was attracted to its one-on-one teaching model, which is designed to address each student's specific educational issues and needs.

"I had known John from before, but hadn't seen him in 15 years," says Milner. "When I happened to bump into him, he was struggling with Tutor Doctor. He had built a good business with six franchisees, but needed a different skill set to expand it further."

That's where Milner's experience came in handy. His background included an executive role with WSI, a Toronto-based Internet marketing consultancy franchise system, which had expanded to include thousands of franchises in multiple countries. And before WSI, he had served in a variety of business consulting and corporate roles.

"I put an investment group together and acquired Tutor Doctor from John," he says. "He stayed involved for a couple more years before moving on."

### A personal connection

Milner says he was also attracted to the business because of his own academic struggles as a child.

"When I started talking with John about the company, I got goosebumps, because he was very passionate about helping kids," he says. "The appeal of the educational space was the chance to engage in important work. I also loved that it was a home-based, low-overhead, white-collar opportunity. It would require a relatively low sum to enter the business as a franchisee."

The concept also brought to mind Milner's own children. "My kids were 11 and 13 at the time, right at the stage where tutoring can really help," he explains. "My son was bright and independent and school came easily to

him. My daughter worked very hard, but it didn't come as easily to her. Both ended up benefiting from Tutor Doctor on a scholastic basis. It was a big deal for my daughter to get on the honour roll. With a tutor's help, she made it—and now she really believes she can do anything. The other day she said, 'I think I'll go to Harvard!'"

Milner's son, meanwhile, benefited because education has become intensely competitive and even A-level students are facing more pressure to succeed.

"While in high school, he wanted to get into a specific physics and engineering program at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont.," Milner explains. "There are a lot of applicants to that program and only a limited number of spots. Tutor Doctor got him over the hump and now he's heading to Queen's!"

From these experiences, Milner has seen firsthand how tutoring can solve students' problems their families aren't necessarily equipped to tackle themselves. The one-on-one learning ensures greater privacy for the student while alleviating the parents of some of their burden.

"We take a lot of care in matching student to tutor, figuring out who's the right fit for the child's learning style, personality and situation at home, among other factors," he says. "Then we send reports to each family after each tutoring session to update them on their children's progress."

### Fostering franchisees

As these values have become more closely defined over the years, Milner says a distinctive franchisee culture has been developed.

"We work hard to attract people who want to help people, as that's been a big part of our success," he says. "We've been tested, such as when a potential franchisee was ready to move forward in 2008, but wasn't the right fit and we had to walk away."

With this business culture in mind, Milner has focused on fostering collaboration between franchisees, rather than any sense of competition.

"They work with each other and with us as the franchisor," he says. "We pick up on ways they've developed to make the system more efficient. We share ideas for everything from marketing to back-office management. Everyone is in the same boat, rowing in the same direction."

### A global vision

Milner has recognized education is one of the only sectors that is universally valued around the world by different cultures, suggesting there is enormous potential for a tutoring franchise system to grow internationally. Indeed, a recent

study projects the private tutoring industry will be worth \$102.8 billion by 2018.

Today, Tutor Doctor's niche in this market includes more than 300 franchises in Canada, the U.S., Mexico, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, the U.K., Ireland, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. Plans for further expansion include Switzerland, Tunisia and Qatar, among other countries. It is little wonder Tutor Doctor has consistently been ranked among the world's fastest-growing franchise systems since 2009.

"As we continue with expansion, our main goal is to become a household name around the world," says Milner. "We want to be the undisputed giant in the supplemental education industry." 