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Hoosier entrepreneur working to keep lawns green

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After 16 years in manufacturing, Plainfield resident Pat Mahoney decided he needed a change of scenery.

It turned out that scenery would end up being his new business.

Last October, Mahoney — a native of Madison — decided to try his luck in landscaping by opening a Spring-Green Lawn Care franchise in Plainfield.

"I've always been personally involved with my own lawn and I like doing that kind of work outdoors," Mahoney said. "I started shopping around and I knew I wanted to go to a franchise because of their success rate. I looked at 20 different franchises and Spring-Green stuck out because it met with my other goals and I wanted to keep a small staff."

Since its inception in 1977 in Naperville, Ill., Spring-Green has expanded to include 119 locations in 25 states. The franchise is especially attractive to new business owners looking to maintain low overhead costs while working at home until

a customer base is built.

Mahoney's Spring-Green franchise serves a wide area west of Indianapolis, from Lebanon to Mooresville. Its primary business is weed control and lawn fertilization, but it also offers tree and shrub care, as well as insect control.

While his franchise is not yet even a year old, Mahoney said he has already built a loyal customer base and has roughly an 85 percent retention rate among customers.

"Customer loyalty is big and we take great strides to create that," Mahoney said. "It was also a big reason for me in leaving manufacturing. Whether I was going into fast food or any other kind of business I felt like the quality of customer service was going down the drain and I wanted to be a part of fixing that."

Mahoney said the demand for lawn care partly stems from the social framework of today's neighborhoods.

"There are a lot more, as I call them, cookie cutter neighborhoods," Mahoney said. "A lot of homes look the same and lawn care is

taking off because if one person wants a great lawn, their neighbors want one too. Everyone is trying to keep up with the neighbors and have a good looking lawn area."

Recent rainfall has caused rapid growth among local lawns, but Mahoney said the wet weather actually hasn't substantially affected his business.

"We were more affected by the drought we had last year," he said. "The lack of rain damaged so many yards last summer so we saw a huge increase of customers last fall."

Another factor affecting Mahoney's business has been the recent spike of fuel costs. Because fertilizer is made partly of petroleum, rising gas prices have hurt his material costs.

"The economy has hurt all of our bottom lines," Mahoney said. "We don't tend to raise our prices in big chunks. Fertilizer is almost 80 percent petroleum so that definitely affects us."

Despite rising costs, Mahoney said he plans to expand his franchise to include one or two addition-



SUBMITTED PHOTO.

Pat Mahoney of Plainfield runs a Spring-Green Lawn Care-franchise that serves customers from Lebanon to Mooresville.

al locations over the next five years. He said numerous landscaping opportunities could arise from an I-69 link from Indianapolis to Evansville.

Mahoney offered a few words of advice for other entrepreneurs looking to make a smooth career transition when switching fields.

"Do a lot of research," he said. "Make sure you know your goals, have a good business plan, and really know what you're getting into."