

SUCCESS STORY #46

THE ULTIMATE SYSTEMIZER

Tony Peters

It's never too late to get involved with real estate investing. The key is to educate yourself - and then take action.

The first day of the summer of 2007 dawned hot and sunny. It was the kind of weather residents yearn for after a cold, snowy winter and wind-swept, wet spring. But Tony Peters was a little too busy to take much note. He was, after all, the guy behind the summer launch of a lease-to-own residential real estate company selling franchises to real estate investors across the nation. It was part of a personal promise to help 3,333 people realize the ultimate dream of owning their own homes. Tony was making it happen.

Tony, 46, got into the residential real estate business for entirely personal reasons. In 2001, with more than 18 years of experience with the same company in the industrial construction industry, he left a management position and took some time off to spend with his family. "My life lacked balance," he says. "I knew I wanted to work, but I didn't want to work the way I had been working."

By that fall, he and his wife Jo-Ann were signed up for their first Quickstart program. Tony had already attended it. "I realized she needed to be there, too," he says. "I wasn't going to come back and do a sales pitch. If this was something we were going to do, it was important that we do it together."

Within weeks of that first Quickstart, they were buying property, with Tony headlining the property searches and acquisitions and Jo-Ann handling the books. They had transacted 150 revenue and lease-to-own properties by mid - 2007 and were holding about 60 doors. They were also going full stream ahead on their plans to franchise Creative Housing Solutions Canada, the lease-to-own company they started in 2003.

Creating a Canadian version of a successful U.S.-based investment strategy, Tony and Jo-Ann had helped more than 50 renters buy their principal residences. By 2005, Tony was fielding a growing number of

requests from others who wanted to use his approach. He liked the idea of sharing strategies, but was concerned about quality control. While the lease-to-own investment strategy isn't for everyone, Tony liked knowing he and Jo-Ann were making a real difference in people's lives. "With me," he explains, "it's not just about the investment dollar. It's not just about the house. It's about the people who want to buy that house."

Other people's interest in his own business success story made Tony realize he had a replicable product. He spent a year on legal issues and branding, then rolled the first franchises out in 2007. He figures there could be 10 to 12 across Canada by the end of 2007, 50 by the end of 2008 and 100 by the end of 2009. Tony's vision also includes taking his business model onto the international stage.

"There is a lot of interest," he acknowledges, "but it takes time to make sure we have the right people doing it for the right reason. Yes, they'll make money doing it our way, but they will also help others in the process." A creative way in which he can achieve his goal of helping 3,333 people across the country.

With his own kids now 11 and 14, that sense of altruism is more important than ever. Both kids own property and have portfolios that benefited from equity appreciation. "But," Tony underlines, "they also understand why it's important to help other people, too."

The commitment to help is why Tony asks those looking to buy a franchise if they are currently involved with, or are willing to be involved with, a charitable group or non-profit organization. He readily admits it's a due diligence question that might strike some potential franchisees as odd. He also knows it's a quick way to disqualify those who see the lease-to-own market as a way to take advantage of renters struggling to buy their own homes.

As franchisees come on board, Tony expects he'll focus increasingly more attention on helping this new group of entrepreneurs be successful. While he's busy doing that, he and Jo-Ann's portfolio will be busy doing its own thing, too. In other words, it'll be generating cash flow and equity appreciation. "That's what happens," Tony concludes, "when you take control of your own financial future."

