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Small Business on washingtonpost.com

By Sharon McLoone

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'It's a Wrap' Is a New Beginning for Serial Entrepreneur

Some might consider owning a boat too big to fit in your garage a good problem to have.

Because when you're a taxidermist/marlin fisherman/portable potty millionaire, it just might give you an idea.

Mike Enos is a working man's [Christo](#). But unlike Christo, Enos doesn't wrap in the name of art; he wraps because there's a demand. His franchise business [Fast Wrap](#), a commercial and residential shrink wrapper, has taken off in a weak economy where half-finished construction projects riddle the nation's landscape, slowly deteriorating until work can begin again.

Enos, 42, is already a veteran of several different careers. He went to taxidermy school after graduating from high school and built one of the most successful businesses in his field in Reno and Winnemucca, Nev. He grew up there, where the sky is big and the hunting is good. His business flourished. At 19 years old, he was bringing in over \$100,000 a year. But like most entrepreneurs, Enos was always on the lookout for the next big thing.

While at a convention on the video industry -- a new area of interest -- Enos heard Blockbuster founder **Wayne Huizenga** speak about how prior to launching Blockbuster he was in the waste disposal business for 18 years. Enos immediately began investigating that industry and saw there was a huge demand for portable toilets. Although it was a capital-intensive business, there was a high return on the dollar. He opened **Johnny on the Spot** in 1993 in Reno. The business was a success.

In 1994, Enos, an avid duck hunter, bought an air boat, which was too big to fit in his garage. He kept it outside behind his office near the freeway, covering it with tarps. Traveling on the freeway one day, he saw brand new boats shrink wrapped to protect them from the elements. He called the firm to see if they would wrap his boat. They wouldn't so he turned to the maker of the materials -- the wittily named Dr. Shrink. They sent him the goods, heat gun included. Enos wrapped the boat himself and there the boat sat. A couple of times a week someone came into his office asking where he got it wrapped. His secretary finally asked him if he could move the boat, she became so busy fielding inquiries.

"Everybody wanted me to wrap their Bobcat or their backhoe or even their patio furniture," said Enos.

He sold his toilet venture in 2006 to a large firm that was buying up similar, smaller firms across the country. "I did quite well" in that deal, he said. Well enough to go buy a yacht, go to Mexico and do some marlin fishing with his dad. He proudly remembers the day -- Oct. 28, 2007 -- he caught a 509 lb. black marlin.

But the interest in his shrink wrapped boat stuck in the back of his mind. "When I was toying around doing something after I sort of retired, I was going to open a salt water fish studio specializing in bill fish, when I realized it just wasn't going to produce the returns I needed," said Enos.

He went back to Reno and opened Fast Wrap -- a West Coast-based mobile shrink wrapping franchise offering on-site wrapping of everything from buildings and bridges to generators and piping. He

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started his business at an opportune time -- the construction industry was beginning to crumble in Nevada. When the bottom fell out of the housing market, developers were left with half-finished buildings and construction sites full of depreciating equipment.

Enos spent about 18 months developing a franchise program and hired IFranchise Group to help him franchise the name and structure the company. He expects to have 16 to 20 franchisees within the next 12 months. Shrink wrap has been around since 1978 and big names like 3M make the product, but it's distributed through many suppliers.

He got his franchise certification from the Federal Trade Commission in February 2007 and his first state registration in April 2008.

Franchises are now open in Spokane, Wash.; Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; Denver, Colo.; and Reno and Las Vegas, Nev.

"We're in the asset protection business," said Enos, explaining the firm's success in the economic downturn. Fast Wrap's sales have grown 40 percent over the last seven months, according to Enos. He got a call recently from a church in Lake Tahoe that was halfway built when its funding dried up. "The only option they have right now is to let it sit exposed to the elements where all the wood and fancy engraving will deteriorate or to wrap it. We're seeing a lot of that -- it's great for us and bad for them."

Fast Wrap, which has 14 employees and was financed by Enos, has built a client list that extends beyond the construction industry. The company wraps plasma cutters for a small business that ships all over the world. Farmers, who were buying old billboards to protect their horse hay bales, are now wrapping the bales to protect them from rain and snow. Enos has also wrapped large truck tires that were no longer needed when the construction industry weakened. Their owner was tired of leasing storage space for them in a warehouse. Now they're wrapped and kept outside.

Enos has also been talking to the American Red Cross and insurance firms about services his company can offer when disaster strikes.

He believes that even though times are tough, small firms can prevail. "A successful entrepreneur is a risk taker," said Enos. "If you believe in your concept or your business enough and failure is not an option...money is out there. If you have a good concept and a track record of being a hard working guy who makes things happen, money will find you."

By Sharon McLoone | November 18, 2008; 12:18 PM ET [Profiles in Entrepreneurship](#)

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