

SBM

The Source for Business Owners

ST. LOUIS
**Small
Business
Monthly****Special**
Support Services
Pages 26-30

VOL. 18 ISSUE IV

Celebrating 17 Years!

MAY 2005

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St. Louis Small Business Monthly—www.SBMon.com

May 2005

Franchising: Buying Your Way Into Business

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Former Mushroom Salesman Jumps Into Metal Business

The entrepreneurial seeds for Aden Hillsman were planted at a young age and were sown over a 23-year career as a mushroom salesman throughout the Midwest. "I started working in my father's drug store in Tennessee when I was 12 years old," Hillsman said. "Because of that, I've always wanted to have my own business, and I knew I wanted to go with a franchised company, since the concept has already been tested and proven."

Hillsman got his chance in 2001 when he and his wife, Rita, purchased a Metal Supermarkets franchise.

Metal Supermarkets is the convenience store of the metal industry, offering fast service on metals cut to size with no minimum order. Customers include small and large manufacturers, tool and die shops, machine shops, hotels, hospitals, government agencies, municipalities, schools and universities. Before the franchise opened, most small quantity metal buyers were forced to keep as much

as \$10,000-\$15,000 worth of metal on hand in case they had a breakdown. Now, these firms can buy exactly what they need, cut to size, with no minimum order.

He's weathered 9-11, the economy and rising steel prices, and Hillsman said, "things are looking up."

He's relied heavily on his sales experience to lead the company. "We do business with a diverse group of people," Hillsman said. "Machine shops, schools, large manufacturers, defense contractors, small sub-contractors, you name it. Over the years I've been in many meetings with heads of companies. I've always said I could survive in that environment as well as on the loading dock. You need to be a very versatile person to be a business owner. You must wear a lot of different hats."



Aden Hillsman