

U.S.-based legal services franchise targets small business

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Special

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During his 25-year career as a Toronto police officer, Rob MacKenzie saw a lot of situations where people could use a good lawyer.

So after retiring from the force, he introduced a way for ordinary citizens to get high-priced legal advice.

In 1998 MacKenzie led the first Canadian expansion of LegalShield, a 40-year-old Oklahoma-based legal services company that charges a monthly fee for 24-hour access to a lawyer from a top-flight law firm.

"We're creating access to the average citizen," said MacKenzie, 57, adding people routinely call police to get advice because they can't afford a \$500-an-hour lawyer. "They hesitate to pick up the phone and get proper legal advice, because the cost is so incredibly high."

LegalShield was started by a former teacher, Harland Stonecipher, who spent his life savings on lawyer fees after he was sued following a car accident.

Over the last 18 months the company has been on an expansion tear,

rapidly building its sales network within Canada, particularly in the business-rich GTA. MacKenzie said LegalShield's services are used by roughly 50,000 Canadians, about a fifth of which are located in Ontario.

The company changed its name from Pre-Paid Legal Services in 2011 after being bought by private equity firm MidOcean Partners for \$650 million. MacKenzie said the rebranding was done to make the company sound "friendlier" and to better target its demographic of middle-class families and small-business owners.

LegalShield has partnered with Toronto law firm Mills & Mills, to whom it pays a "very large" monthly retainer for its network of 5,000 lawyers to provide on-call services to Ontario members.

"There is a waiting list of lawyers who would love to be on our system, because we pay very well," said MacKenzie, adding subscribers pay an average of \$25 a month to get advice on identity theft, tax audits, trial defence, speeding tickets, wills, how to incorporate a business and more.

Small businesses of up to 50 employees can get covered for

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\$105 a month and larger firms can offer the service as a payroll benefit deduction.

Brampton native Amanda Russell quit her full-time job last May to focus full-time on building her LegalShield clientele, launching a

local business networking group — We Can Network! — that has 135 online members.

"I wasn't happy with the company I was with and this kind of spoke to me," said the 33-year-old, who has recruited more than 30

monthly subscribers. "We operate like a brokerage. Ideally I want to become the broker of my company for LegalShield."

MacKenzie said his company fills the gap between the rich, who can afford any lawyer they want, and the poor, who are covered by provincially-funded programs such as Legal Aid Ontario.

Besides Ontario, the company has sales people, or what it calls "associates," in British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba.

Hospital foundations get new boss

Steve Hoscheit has been named the new shared president and CEO of The Credit Valley Hospital Foundation and Trillium Health Centre Foundation.

His appointment became effective April 1.

"With his existing strong working relationship with The Credit Valley Hospital Foundation and his keen understanding of how both foundations work collaboratively

and strategically together to raise the important site-specific funds for Trillium Health Partners, Steve will enable a strong continuum of leadership across all organizations," said Michele Darling, board chair for The Credit Valley Hospital Foundation.

Hoscheit was previously president and CEO of Trillium Health Centre Foundation. Kathy Hay, former president and CEO of The Credit Valley Hospital Foundation, left the

foundation at the end of March to join the Art Gallery of Ontario.

For the past year, Hoscheit had been working side-by-side with Hay to develop a strong working model between the two foundations, following the merger of Credit Valley Hospital and Trillium Health Centre. The two foundations work together to raise funds needed for each site within Trillium Health Partners.

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TIP OF THE WEEK

HOME IMPROVEMENT QUICK TIP:

How to select exterior stain colour combinations

Did you know: the most attractive homes on the block use several shades of stain on the exterior woodwork? Those homeowners have used not just one, not two, but as many as three or four colour combinations. Now just how did they select such complementary hues?

According to experts, the place to begin is by identifying the main body colour of the house. Often the brick or stone determines this colour. For example, if your main body colour is from the red family, seek out a complementary palette to mix and match stains for the doors, windows, moldings, shutters, trim, fence, deck, as well as any other decorative wood features.

A helpful tool is available online at www.olympic.com. The interactive chart on the site details seven colour schemes - green, brown, red, cream, blue, gray, and yellow. Select your home's main body colour and click to reveal a variety of palettes that you can use to make your home the best on the block.

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