

SHAKING UP THE MOVING SECTOR

John Prittie drives the moving industry forward in Canada

By Karen Stevens



John Prittie, CEO and President of TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® Canada and Heron Capital Corporation® (HCC), is more than passionate about franchising, and, with more than 30 years in the business, he has the experience to back up that enthusiasm. “When I first entered the field of franchising, people used to have to look ‘franchise’ up in the dictionary,” he says. “Today it’s a household word and well understood business concept.”

Prittie has an Economics degree from the University of Western Ontario, as well as a Bachelor of Commerce degree and an MBA from the University of Windsor. “Never once during the seven years at university in any of my business courses did we discuss franchising, yet franchising became my life,” he recounts.

It was in the 1980’s, while working with Dominion Food Stores to launch the Mini-A-Mart® convenience stores and Mr. Grocer® supermarkets, that Prittie started his career in franchising. Since then, he has worked with franchise organizations such as Mother’s Restaurants®, TCBY®, East Side Mario’s®, Casey’s®, Shred-it®, Mini-Tankers®, PROSHRED®, and, of course, TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® Canada.

While his experiences include opening franchises as far away as South America and the Middle East, his focus has been primarily the United States and Canada. Among his many accomplishments, Prittie has facilitated recruiting and awarding franchises to approximately 800 franchisees, and has put together business plans and operations manuals for international franchise systems. “I am an industry veteran,” he declares.

TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® originated in the United States in 1985, establishing its base in the Midwest. Since then, the company has expanded to about 355 offices, with 3,000 trucks across the whole franchise system. Because of the brand’s success in markets with similar demographics to the ones in Canada, Prittie was opti-

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

mistic about bringing the brand north of the border with the HCC. “Based on what was being accomplished in the United States, I figured we could develop around 40 franchises in Canada, and the math worked! I am pleased to say we now have 30 offices and close to 150 trucks on the road servicing the Canadian market,” he says.

Coming north of the border

TWO MEN AND A TRUCK®’s story in Canada started when Prittie and the HCC were looking for a new franchise opportunity. They were drawn to TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® for a number of reasons, including its service-based business model, but above all, its position as a leader in the moving and storage industry. “Our research indicated that 14-16 per cent of the Canadian population moved every year, [which is] a renewable resource, and that represented a \$4-5 billion dollar industry in Canada,” notes Prittie.

With that information in mind, HCC was optimistic about bringing the brand to Canada. “We believed we could raise the bar and deliver a higher level of service. Additionally, the principal shareholder in HCC is Herity, and they are homebuilders. We can build a customer’s new home and move in the family,” he explains.

Prittie was introduced to Bill Edwards, who repre-

sented TWO MEN AND A TRUCK International®, as well as the management team at TWO MEN AND A TRUCK®, which was comprised primarily of Mary Ellen Sheets, the founder, and her family members. Of course, Prittie and HCC did their due diligence, meeting numerous times and attending their annual meeting before completing non-disclosure and non-competition agreements.

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“The family was completely transparent and shared considerable information, aiding in the process of completing our due diligence,” he recalls. He was also impressed by the franchisees: “I can remember staying up very late at their annual meeting to visit with franchisees, and I was surprised that I couldn’t find a single franchisee who wasn’t happy.”

So Prittie and HCC brought TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® to Canada, where they have expanded and established the brand. He credits their success to “good old-fashioned customer service.” Striving to exceed the customer’s expectations, they employ the “Grandma Rule,” which is to treat everyone the way you’d like your grandma to be treated. He says the brand is unique in the industry because they provide detailed quotes, and don’t add fuel surcharges or extra fees above the original estimate. “The moving industry is not regulated, and there are many fly-by-night operators out there,” Prittie explains. “The moving and storage industry had a bad reputation, opening the door for a quality service provider!”

HCC and TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® International share similar corporate values and beliefs, one of which is to give back to the community. TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® Canada launched the Mikey-on-Board program in 2013, and now have automated external defibrillators (AEDs) on all trucks, with all movers and drivers trained on their use. As moving is one of the top three stresses in life, TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® is ready and able to respond to an event of sudden cardiac arrest. “We’re not only in the moving business, we’re in the business of saving lives,” says Prittie.

Bringing the right partners on board

TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® franchisees come from a variety of backgrounds. “We have white-collar, high-net-worth business executives, blue-collar middle manag-

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ers, and recent graduates from university,” Prittie says. “Aside from meeting the minimum financial requirements, the most important qualities we look for are strong interpersonal skills and work ethic.”

Since the job of the franchisee is not to drive trucks or move furniture, but rather to be actively involved in the management, administration, and sales areas, “A person with strong interpersonal skills will excel at recruiting, hiring, and training movers and drivers, and will enjoy the sales, marketing, and promotional side of the business,” he notes.

Prittie’s enthusiasm for franchising is tempered by an understanding of the reality of starting up a business. “Franchising is a wonderful industry with lots of opportunity, but it’s not a get-rich-quick scheme!” He stresses the importance of thinking through the decision very carefully. “It is very important that prospective franchisees do an inventory of their interests, lifestyle, skill sets, and capital, and find a franchise to which they are well suited. Some franchise candidates are happy to stand behind the cash register and collect cash, while others prefer to be out and about with tools in their hands.”

“In general, the franchise business model is a good one. The key for success for new franchisees is to follow the system. Don’t waste time trying to reinvent the wheel.”

In fact, Prittie recommends that the process of deciding on a franchise opportunity take as long as three to six months. “There is no easy business, it’s all hard work – particularly in the early stages – and if you don’t like what you are doing, trouble lies ahead,” he emphasizes, adding that franchisors and prospective franchisees need to ensure that they have a good fit and that they do their due diligence. “In general, the franchise business model is a good one. The key for success for new franchisees is to follow the system. Don’t waste time trying to reinvent the wheel.”

Moving forward, Prittie says he is most excited about TWO MEN AND A TRUCK®’s “recent and ongoing developments with regard to technology and software that streamline our operations.” This includes a new software called New Movers Who Care 2®, which allows the company to inventory the contents of an entire home. An algorithm uses that information to determine how many movers, hours, and trucks will be needed in order to complete the move. “We are typically accurate within 10-15 minutes,” he says.

Beyond the technical aspects of the job, Prittie enjoys the relationships he’s built over his career with partners, management, staff, industry executives, and, of course, franchisees. “When they come back and buy a second or third franchise, I know we are doing a good job,” says Prittie. He’s especially excited that his son and his son’s close friend have followed him into the TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® business, and have purchased franchises. After many years in franchising, Prittie says the most rewarding experience has been “seeing franchisees and their families pursue and fulfill their dreams.” 🍁

TWO MEN AND A TRUCK STATS

Franchise units in Canada: 30, U.S.: 320, Other: 5

Corporate units in Canada: 3, U.S.: 1, Other: 2

Franchise fee: \$50-\$85K

Investment required: \$171K-\$320K

Start-up capital required: \$121K

Training: 2 weeks

Available territories: AB, BC, MB, NB, NL, ON, QC, SK

In business since: 2005

Franchising since: 2005

CFA member since: 2004



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