



Breaking into 'Big Biz'

Local resident and Bookkeeping Express CEO becomes national business talk radio show's 'franchise expert.'

[By Mike DiCicco](#)

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Greg Jones, Great Falls resident and CEO of the McLean-based BookKeeping Express, has gone nationwide, and not just with franchises of his accounting business. In November, Jones became the "franchise expert" for "The Big Biz Show," a business talk radio show that airs on more than 150 AM stations across the country.

"It's very lighthearted, very loose [and has] almost a comic sense to a certain degree," Jones said. "It's certainly not '60 Minutes.'" Every other Wednesday, he spends 20 minutes or so chatting with the show's hosts on the air. "We decide on topics, but we typically never stay on topic," he said.

THE COMPANY he hires for public relations, Fishman PR, inquired about getting him on the show after the CEO of a company he invests in made a "Big Biz" appearance. Jones had rare qualifications, with experience on both ends of the franchise business model. He and a partner are in the process of opening their third Five Guys restaurant franchise in Florida, while he and two partners sell franchises of BookKeeping Express. Although they bought the accounting company at about the time that the economy fell apart in late 2008, they have opened 19 franchises since then, with the latest opening last week in Pennsylvania. "We've been selling consistently every month," he said.

BookKeeping Express, which was founded in 1984 in southern California, offers accounting services for small businesses, a market that Jones said does not diminish when the economy suffers. "This service, it's not sexy. Accounting is not sexy. But it's a service that doesn't go away," he said.

Most small businesses try to do their own accounting, "which tends to end in a bad way," Jones said, noting that small business owners rarely are trained in accounting. When the economy sours, businesses that were hiring certified public accountants (CPAs) to do the work may start trying to keep their own books in order to save money. BookKeeping Express, he said, offers an alternative that is cheaper than hiring a CPA, which can cost up to \$200 per hour.

Jones and his partners sell territories that contain a minimum of 1,500 businesses with revenues of \$2.5 million per year or less, the company's target demographic, and they offer franchisees full training, certification, a franchise development program, public relations, an information technology structure and other services. "We give them a turnkey business operation, so that they really just have to drive the ship," he said.

"It's been very well received. We're obviously pretty happy with how we got out of the gate here," Jones said. "We're going through the franchise process with the Canadian government, so we're soon going to be expanding up into Canada."

As an affordable dining option, Five Guys, too, is weathering the economic crisis well, he said. "If you've got five or eight bucks in your pocket and you're hungry, you're going to get a burger." He and his partner bought a five-unit territory of the chain at the end of 2005.

JONES was originally in the telecommunications industry, working in Chicago for LCI International, which was later bought out by Qwest Communications International. After moving to the area in 1999, he began investing in real estate but stopped when home prices got too high. Franchising offered another option.

In 1981, he was captain of the Penn State football team, an experience that he said taught him discipline and toughness that helped him later in life. Playing a sport, he said, "gives you a lot of great attributes that apply to the business world."

"The Big Biz Show" airs weekdays from 4-6 p.m. and can be heard locally on WDMV AM 700. Jones' slot is usually around 5:40 p.m. every other Wednesday.