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RED DEER ADVOCATE

A little off the top

By Harley Richards - Red Deer Advocate

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In a man's world, haircuts would be impulse decisions and an opportunity to sip beer and watch televised sports.

Chatters Canada Ltd. is hoping to create that world with a chain of salons operating under the name Tommy Gun's Original Barbershop.

The Red Deer-based company plans to open a Tommy Gun's in Bower Place Shopping Centre on Nov. 23. Another outlet in Penticton, B.C., could follow after Christmas, said Chatters CEO Jason Volk.

"It's our goal to roll these out across the country in the next two years.

"We would anticipate opening about 20 a year for the first five years."

Volk stressed that the Tommy Gun's concept was developed specifically for men and boys.

The mirrors facing customers will contain television monitors, stylists will be those who prefer cutting men's hair and specialized services like hot shaves will be available.

The hair and skin care products for sale will be geared toward males, and there will be a men's gift centre with Tommy Gun's branded products like watches and shaving kits.

"We really want to brand Tommy Gun's as a cool brand for men," said Volk.

He added that the decor will simulate gangster-era downtown Chicago or New York, with brickwork and antique-looking barber's chairs.

The salons will have special queuing software that will enable customers to enter their names and mobile contact information at a self-serve kiosk.

A computer will advise them of the approximate waiting time, with this information updated periodically and displayed prominently.

"If you want to go shopping, it will send you a text message saying, 'You're next in line, please return to Tommy Gun's,'" said Volk.

The plan is also to place soft seating in the malls in front of each Tommy Gun's outlet so customers have a comfortable setting in which to wait.

The Tommy Gun's concept also calls for beer or wine to be available to customers, although Alberta regulations requiring an on-site kitchen in licensed premises will probably prevent this from happening in this province. As a result, the beverages served at Alberta's Tommy Gun's will be restricted to the non-alcoholic variety.

The Chatters' network currently consists of 96 stores, including two in the United States. Many existing franchisees have expressed interest in also acquiring a Tommy Gun's Original Barbershop, said Volk.

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The Red Deer outlet will serve as a test store before the concept is rolled out on a broader basis, he said.

Ultimately, the Chatters distribution centre at its Burnt Lake Business Park headquarters will supply the network.

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