

FRANCHISING

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Hillbilly Heaven. Busy Bodies. Highland Solar.

Ever heard of them? If not, you will.

Meet the owners of three franchises worth watching

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Toronto's Metro Convention Centre was teeming with the curious and tentatively entrepreneurial at Franchise Canada's 13th annual trade show Jan. 9 and 10, which featured 160 franchises ranging from the household names to the unknown and absurd, jostling for the attention of more than 5,000 potential franchisees who passed through. Here are three recent market entries that caught the eye of our [Your Business](#) correspondent:



HILLBILLY HEAVEN

The story: It started with some really excellent hot sauce.

Pete's Pepper Palace "was like a liquor store for hot sauce," Cameron Bailey recalls. "It was a one-of-a-kind thing."

Those in the know would stop by the store in Burlington, Ont., rifle through its

selection and emerge with the spicy condiment they were seeking.

Mr. Bailey had been a devoted customer for only two weeks when the firefighter who ran the place as a side gig announced he was closing.

"I said, 'Well, what do you want for the whole store?'"

And for \$6,000 down, plus monthly \$3,000 installations, it was his. He moved to a better location across the street, changed the name, and added product as the store's customer base grew. The catalyst came when Ms. Bailey lost her executive assistant job in December, 2008. The couple poured all they had into the business. Now almost two-thirds of their sales are food, sold to hungry customers lured by word-of-mouth about the pulled-pork sandwiches.

The game plan: Proliferate and branch out: The Baileys are opening a franchise in Oakville, Ont., and they are in talks to start up a location in Hamilton, Ont., ideally near McMaster University's grease-loving student population. They also hope to open a "Street Snax" store to capitalize on the area's plethora of summer festivals.

The opportunity: The barbecue pit market remains untapped north of the 49th parallel, Ms. Bailey argues: Most of their products are ordered from -- or owe their inspiration to -- the southern states.

The Food Network helps: Two of its most popular shows -- *Diners, Drive-ins and Dives*, and *BBQ Pitmasters* -- play off the increasingly popular grease-pit eatery.

The challenge: Building a brand. The restaurant is new and the Baileys' advertising budget nil. They're counting on over-the-top service (and servings) to keep customers not only coming back, but telling their friends.