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## Salon-owning trio wants to plan for expansion

By Tiana Velez

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### The story

On the night of Sept. 10, 2001, Karen Dinius arrived at Boston's Logan International Airport to check on a flight.

Her schedule had her flying out the following morning but, eager to return home, she snared a seat on a plane leaving that night.

Sitting in a plush chair at the salon she now owns with her two daughters, Kendra and Kara, Karen said 9/11 changed her life in more ways than one.

"My daughters didn't want me flying any more after that day, so our plans to open our business were accelerated," she said.

Five years ago Karen had a career as a regional sales manager for a local software firm, which required her to spend two weeks of every month on the East Coast.

For some time she and her daughters had toyed with the idea of operating a salon together, mostly "joking around at backyard barbecues," Kendra said.

Kendra was working as a stylist and had developed a loyal client following, owing in part to her specialization in braiding and extensions. Kara was planning on attending school to become a massage therapist, and their conversations centered on having a place to show off their skills.

During 2001 their talk became serious, and the three began acquiring equipment and supplies for a salon business.

### The profile

I The business: Salon de Futur, 1217 W. Irvington Road, Suite 121, 807-2566

I The owners: Karen, Kendra and Kara Dinius

I The services: Hair and body services, including cuts, color, massage and waxing.

I The challenge: Position salon for expansion without losing sales momentum.

### The consultants

MJ Jensen, IdeaMagic marketing & promotions, 326-7468 or [www.ideamagic.com](http://www.ideamagic.com).

Clint Parry, Action International, 529-6100 or [clintparry@action-international.com](mailto:clintparry@action-international.com).

Linda Mracek, Aviar Commercial Space Planning & Design Inc. 624-3342 or [www.aviardesign.com](http://www.aviardesign.com).

In January 2002 Karen quit her sales job, and the following July the trio opened Salon de Futur in a shopping center at West Irvington Road and Interstate 19.

Guests at the salon are welcomed by a fusion of art deco style and feng shui design, inspired by Karen's interest in both.

Large prints by Polish-American painter Tamara de Lempicka decorate the blue and pale-yellow walls, and small red and black items — a color combination repeated in feng shui design — are placed throughout the salon.

"I wanted to give it kind of a New York feel," she said.

In addition to herself and her two daughters, Karen employs three full-time and two part-time stylists.

Before the year 2002 was through, however, the events of 9/11 would once more play a part in Karen's life — this time in the form of an embattled federal loan program.

After raising 80 percent of the startup funds herself, Karen applied for a loan for the remainder, citing her business' status as woman- and minority-owned, in addition to its location in a low-income area — all criteria for separate federal loan programs.

What she didn't know was that the loan she eventually received was part of the Supplemental Terrorist Activity Relief, or STAR, program intended for "small businesses adversely affected" by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Many of the recipients of the STAR loans, like Karen, were unaware of their loan's designation.

Last year she received her aesthetician license, qualifying her to provide skin-care services such as facials and waxing, and completing the salon's trifecta of skin, hair and body services.

"She joked that it was so she didn't have to sweep the floors," Kendra said.

"That wasn't a joke," Karen retorted, later confirming, "I'm still the salon's janitor."

As it approaches its fourth anniversary, Salon de Futur is in the black and profits are rising. But as the client list grows, the salon's physical space is being stretched to its limit and Karen said she anticipates having to expand soon.

She has three years remaining on her lease to consider how to proceed with her next step.

The advice

Considering the size of the goal, consultants Clint Parry and MJ Jensen decided to make their recommendations a team effort. Before long Linda Mracek, a commercial space planner, was called in to offer her design advice. Their initial assessment was a positive one.

"Salon de Futur has done a great job understanding their target market and then developing the marketing and operations to build a strong clientele," Jensen and Parry wrote in their final

report. Moreover, they have "a solid understanding of their key numbers — sales, expenses — and year-over-year trends are looking favorable."

With a strong foundation, the Diniuses' next step should be to create a clear idea of what kind of business they want in the future. Will it remain a single salon, or become more spa-like with additional body and skin services?

They should be clear about details such as how many workers they want and would need and the full range of products and services they intend to offer — "then design the 'ideal' building to fit this vision," the consultants said.

Next, they recommended Karen contact a bank or lender to assess her current financial state and determine what kind of funding the salon needs to be positioned in to acquire the kind of building she envisioned.

In the meantime, Salon de Futur's interior could be redesigned to maximize the space they're in. Mracek helped create a plan that would allow room for two additional stylist stations, but she had more ideas to give.

Two French doors that separated the reception area from the salon space were removed to give a bigger sense of space.

The white door frame should be painted red, Mracek said, to "tie the red of the reception sofa with the accent red in the adjoining spaces," as well as draw the customer's eyes inward.

The massage and facial room could be redecorated simply with print fabric over the industrial ceiling tile and draped along the walls for a softer look and to give it "a luxury tent feel," she added.

Once the changes have been made — and Karen has already begun implementing some — she should focus on getting the stylists booked about 80 percent of the time, Jensen and Parry said.

Increasing marketing efforts in their area, and expanding them to Sahuarita, would add to public awareness.

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