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MICHAEL MCGARDLE/POST-TRIBUNE

Michael Harkless has become a franchise owner for SmartView Window Solutions, a commercial window tinting procedure that helps keep energy costs low.

A 'green' outlook

Valpo man's new venture aims at cutting energy costs

By AMY LAVALLEY

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VALPARAISO — After 33 years working different jobs in the composite industry — think fiberglass shower stalls, vehicles and the like — Michael Harkless lost his job with a boat manufacturer.

"I was downsized," said Harkless, 54, of Valparaiso, whose job evaporated in February 2008.

He tried the usual online job Web sites with no luck and decided it was time to switch careers, because he figured his field wasn't coming back for at least five years and he didn't want to wait it out.

Harkless wanted to find a franchise so he would have the support he needed and wouldn't have to worry about making mistakes as he started out.

"I wanted something 'green,' because that's going to be big in the future," he said.

After going through an online company that matches potential franchisees with franchises — much like a dating

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Check out the Web site
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service — he found SmartView Window Solutions. The franchise installs ceramic film on the windows of homes and businesses to lower energy costs and protect furniture and belongings from sun damage.

On July 13, Harkless became one of a handful of SmartView's franchisees, working for the time being out of his home.

"I think I have enough skills and ability to run my own business," he said. "I would prefer my own business, and I wanted something with growth and sustainability."

SmartView, a division of Midlothian, Ill.-based Moran Industries, has five

franchisees, including Harkless, said Pete Baldine, the company's chief development officer.

SmartView is an outgrowth of Moran's automotive window tinting franchise. Window tinting in cars is sometimes for comfort and sometimes for aesthetics, but that's not what home and business owners are looking for, Baldine said.

Those customers want increased cooling capacity and room comfort, as well as the elimination of glare, without noticing the window film is there.

"This is a model that we're very excited about. We fully expect to expand rapidly across the country," Baldine said.

Harkless hopes within the next year to have four employees, each with his or her own service van, and a place for his new venture. His long-term goal is to find other, complementary businesses that he could get involved in — including solar film, which has the same function, but not the bulkiness, as solar panels.

"My idea for the corporation is, it's got to be green-oriented," he said.

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Pete Baldine, chief development officer of SmartView Window Solutions