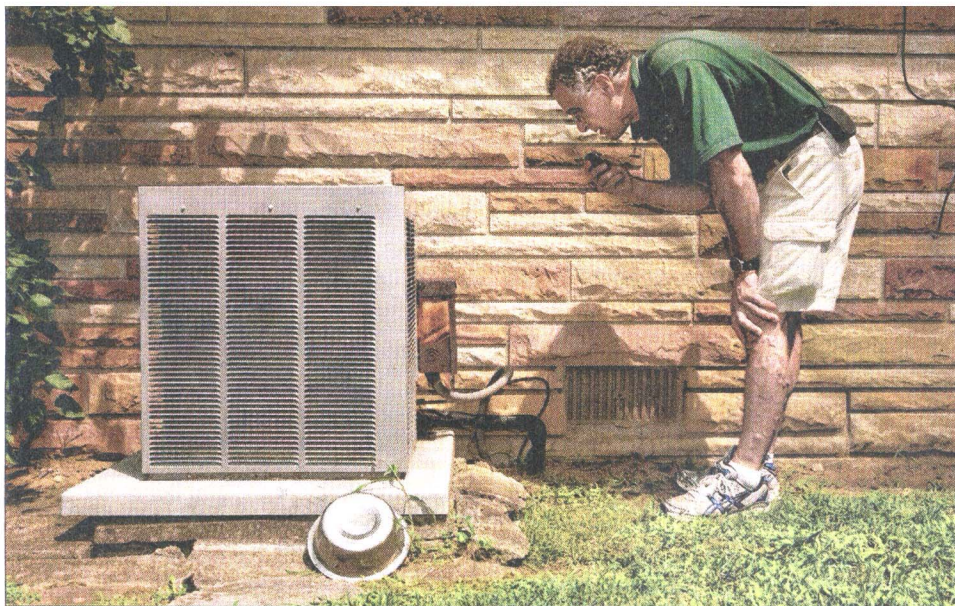


THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

TUESDAY, JULY 20, 2010 ★ "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" II COR. 3:17 ★ 75 CENTS ★ CITY EDITION



JENNIFER CECIL / The Star

Rich Able, owner of Indy Inspection Service, checks a home's air-conditioning unit. New Jersey-based HouseMaster, with 371 U.S. sites, has announced plans for new franchises in the Indianapolis market.

Indy inspectors at home with added competition

HouseMaster entering market, but unfazed independents say personal service is their forte

By Dana Hunsinger

dana.hunsinger@indystar.com

After a close inspection of the Indianapolis market, HouseMaster is moving in.

The New Jersey-based home inspection franchisor will open at least five locations in the next 18 months, entering a market it says is ripe for more home inspectors.

"If you look at how many houses are still selling in Indianapolis, there is significant market share still to be had," said Kathleen Kuhn, president of the 30-year-old company, which has 371 locations nationwide, including two in Indiana — Fort Wayne and Richmond. "The locals may be nervous about us coming in, a company that has been in business as long as we have been in business. But it's about competition and survival of the fittest."

HouseMaster seemingly is surviving just fine. Even amid the national housing crisis, it watched same-store sales jump 25 percent in the first quarter of 2010.

"Each time housing goes through a bubble, it really does great things for our business, because people are concerned about what they are buying," Kuhn said.

And HouseMaster is poised for more



Able, owner of Indy Inspection Service for 10 years, says he has a reputation for thoroughness.

growth. In addition to the five Indianapolis locations, it will open 30 nationwide in the next 18 months.

HouseMaster has just started seeking franchisees for Indianapolis and has not determined specific locations. The franchise fee is \$39,500.

Included in that fee is a major marketing engine behind the local franchisee, with advertising and partnerships with real estate companies and banks that, perhaps, a local independent wouldn't have.

Rich Able said he's not worried. After 10 years as owner of Indy Inspection Service, he says he's gained his own reputation.

HOUSEMASTER

» **WHAT:** Home-inspection franchisor.

» **HEADQUARTERS:** Bound Brook, N.J.

» **LOCATIONS:** 371 throughout the United States and Canada. Two in Indiana — Fort Wayne and Richmond.

» **COMING BY 2011:** 35 new locations nationwide, including five in the Indianapolis area. HouseMaster is seeking local franchisees.

» **FRANCHISE FEE:** \$39,500.

» **WEBSITE:** www.housemaster.com

Tips for finding a reputable home inspector

» Don't trust an inspector simply because he has a state license or certification. All states that issue licenses require training, but the training may be so minimal that it is ineffective. Go to www.in.gov/pla/hi.htm to find Indiana's requirements and to search home inspectors by name.

» Look for an inspector who is associated with a professional inspection organization. Look for affiliation with reputable groups such as National Association of Home Inspectors, the National Institute of Building Inspectors and the American Society of Home Inspectors. Their websites have a "find an inspector" service to locate a member in your area.

» Real estate agents often recommend a home inspector, but don't take that at face value. If the agent suggests one name, ask for two or three others.

» Inspect the inspector. Once you think you have found an inspector, start asking questions. Is he licensed? How many home inspections has he done? Does he have "errors and omissions insurance," which is a sort of malpractice insurance for an inspector. Does he offer a guarantee? Also make sure he puts his findings in a narrative-style report, not just a checklist.

Source: MSN Real Estate

Home

» Randy Hazel gives his clients several names of inspectors.

From A8

"I'm probably more thorough and spend more time doing inspections than most, and clients appreciate that," he said. "Some say people don't want you to spend that much time. Let me tell you. The clients aren't complaining."

Mark Todd, an inspector from Martinsville, said his clients also appreciate having a locally owned company come to their home. He claims that franchised companies like HouseMaster are the fast food of home inspections.

"With the big companies, they will be there for maybe two hours because they will do four or five inspections in a day," said Todd, owner of Advantage

Home Inspection. "I'm not just in and out. If it takes me all day to look that home over, it's fine with me."

HouseMaster's Kuhn said her company's inspections are just as thorough as homebuyers would get from any local inspector.

She said HouseMaster trains and makes sure all its home inspectors are appropriately licensed according to state requirements.

The industry's leading association agrees.

"They go out and do inspections just like anybody else," said David Tamny, president of the American Society of Home Inspectors. "HouseMaster has been around for many years and has a reputation of delivering a consistent product."

The key for homebuyers is to do their own inspection of the inspector, Tamny said. Ask whether they are licensed. Look for those who are members of ASHI. Find out whether they

have errors and omissions insurance, which is a sort of malpractice insurance for an inspector.

It also often helps to ask a real estate agent for a few names of inspectors who have done a good job.

Randy Hazel, a real estate agent with F.C. Tucker, said he often gives his clients several choices of home inspectors.

"I try to drive them in the right direction," he said. "There have been a few I have gravitated toward because I trust them to do a good job."

As the new guy in town, HouseMaster knows it will face competition from home inspector veterans in the area.

"But with 30 years in business, we've seen this before," Kuhn said. "It's about marketing the business and building alliances and partnerships. And then it's about simply going into the home and doing good work."

★ Call Star reporter Dana Hunsinger at (317) 444-6012.