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Cleaning Up: In the Bag expands to 20 Wichita locations with the acquisition of Best Cleaners

WICHITA BUSINESS JOURNAL - BY [Pat Sangimino](#)

In the Bag Dry Cleaners has acquired the assets of the 13 [Best Cleaner](#) locations in Wichita.

The paperwork was signed Wednesday and the transition became official today, meaning In the Bag, which opened its first store in December 2000, is Wichita's biggest dry cleaner with 20 locations.

"Opportunities like this don't come along every day," says David Coyle, the owner of In the Bag. "All this change is very exciting, but it's a lot of work, too."

Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

In the Bag cleans about 20,000 garments a week out of its Ohio Street cleaning facility. Coyle estimates that the Best stores will add nearly 17,000 additional garments each week.

A new computer tracking system, additional equipment and room to grow in the cleaning facility makes completing additional work possible, Coyle says. And as the Best stores grow more productive, his cleaning plant will be able to handle the workload.

"I am a big fan of doing everything under one roof," he says. "I can make it profitable. If I can get sales through the door, I know I can keep the wages and the production price in line. We're going to be doing a lot more volume, but we have room to grow."

The chain, which tripled in storefronts overnight, went from 45 employees to about 90.

"It will take six months to teach our way of doing things," Coyle says. "After that, we're hoping that business will go up a solid 20 percent in a year."

Grow or Die

Best's management realized it was at a crossroad. With chains in Kansas City, Oklahoma City and south Florida, it could have made a push to make Wichita stronger by following Coyle's lead of offering delivery and upgrading the computer system.

"We were at a point where you either pour a lot of money in or you get out," says Kevin Lyng, Best's CEO who works in Overland Park. "The Wichita stores were doing all right. The demographics had changed and we needed to get involved in the pick up and delivery. Selling it to a local operator made sense."

Selling to someone with intimate knowledge of the Best operation made more sense. Coyle worked for the chain in Kansas City following college and was promoted to regional manager of the Wichita stores.

Lyng says that Coyle's knowledge of the Wichita market will give the Best stores a boost. And the additional stores gives Coyle an advantage that comes with capturing the market share.

"For me, market share is important because it gives me the chance to take advantage of buying power," Coyle says. "It allows me to offer the best services at a reasonable price."

Not everyone is frightened by the competition. Miller's Cleaners opened in 1977 and now has six Wichita locations, including four on the west side of town.

"Competition is good because it keeps you on your toes -- it makes you want to be competitive," owner Dan Miller says. "That's why I get up every morning. If we were the only game in town, it would be pretty boring."

Coyle says he plans to watch the new stores closely. At this point, he says he has no plans to close any of them. He also acknowledged that maintaining customer service is a priority for the chain.

"Whenever you get bigger, it becomes more of a challenge to continue to give personal services," he says.



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With the acquisition of Best Cleaners, David Coyle has seen his In the Bag Dry Cleaners grow to 20 Wichita locations.