

SMALL BUSINESS CORNER

Inspectors franchising

Home check-up is partners' area of expertise

By Val Previsch

Enquirer contributor

Looking to maintain high standards in the unregulated and somewhat renegade business climate of the home inspection industry, Kal Patel, founder of Mason-based 1st Inspection Services Inc., said he is looking to expand his business through franchising – but at a slow enough pace to ensure quality work.

Patel, a native of India who moved to the United States in 1974 as a child with his parents, started 1st Inspection Services four years ago after 15 years working in the hotel industry in California and Colorado.

He said he became interested in home inspections after meeting industry veteran Craig Auberger of Springfield, with whom he became friends. Because of his background in hotel development and construction, Patel said he was inspired to put those same skills to work helping new home owners.

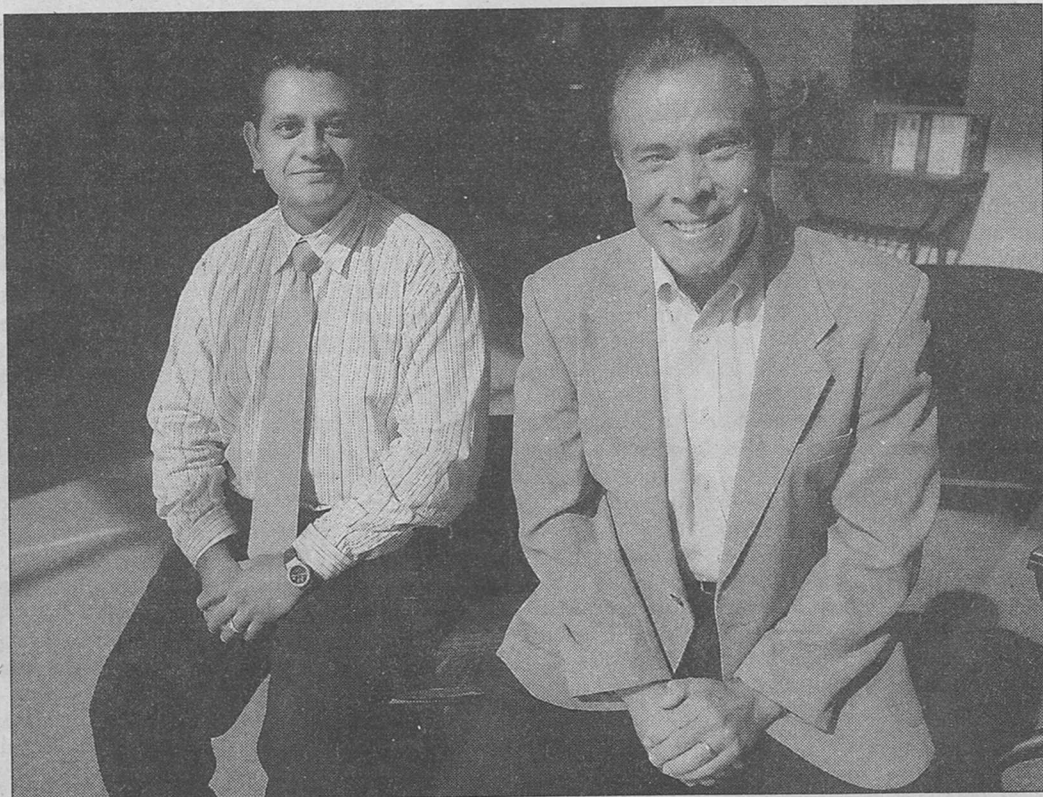
"It brought a lot of passion out in me," he said. "I wanted to help people with their initial purchases."

Auberger, now his consulting partner, teaches courses about home inspection and real estate at Hondros College, a vocational school with several branches in Greater Cincinnati. The two have developed a program for educating potential home inspectors that ensures inspectors meet nationally accepted standards for the industry.

Ohio does not require home inspectors to be licensed. Consequently, many under-qualified inspectors enter the industry, Patel said. Frequently, individuals billing themselves as inspectors have little more than some construction work background, Patel said.

Kentucky started requiring home inspectors to be licensed in 2006, which resulted in a significant reduction in the number of individuals in the business, said Auberger.

Patel and Auberger said they think the same sort of scenario will



The Enquirer/Leigh Taylor

Kal Patel (left) and **Craig Auberger** have teamed up to form 1st Inspection Services. They not only provide the service, but train other inspectors and are franchising their company.

take place in Ohio if proposed legislation to require licensing for home inspectors is passed. In the meantime, Patel said he wants to ensure the highest quality of work with his company by making sure inspectors follow established guidelines.

Patel said his goal in starting 1st Inspection was to exceed the national standards for home inspectors set by the National Association of Certified Home Inspectors.

He requires inspectors working for him and his franchisees to take two vocational-level courses in home inspection and an additional four weeks of training with 1st Inspection – including taking part in about 80 on-site inspections, without pay, before being considered qualified to perform paid home inspections.

1st Inspection is also a member of the American Society of Home Inspectors, which also provides certification and educational opportunities for home inspectors.

Patel's commitment to quality has paid off. The Cincinnati location of 1st Inspection will post revenues of \$250,000 by the end of this year, he said.

Nick Iredale of Anderson Township, who recently hired 1st Inspection to look at a home he might buy, said he was impressed with Patel's knowledge and thoroughness during the inspection.

"What we found useful was that he talked us through things we wouldn't have been aware of otherwise," said Iredale. "He gave us tips on how to maintain things, and then included them in his report."

Ora Forusz of Sibcy Cline in Hyde Park said she frequently recommends 1st Inspection.

"They are very detailed, and also very honest and straightforward," said Forusz. "They know how to explain things."

Forusz said homeowners should be cautious about whom they hire to conduct inspections and said she always recommends inspectors with certification.

Because of the industry's history, Patel said he prefers to be cautious about potential franchise owners and employees.

"We can teach people how to inspect, but it's hard to teach people to be ethical," said Patel. "Not everyone can be a home inspector,

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE

1st Inspection

1st Inspection Services Inc.

Address: 11590 Century Blvd., Suite 200, Springdale

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Web site: www.1stinspections.com

Owner: Kal Patel

because the home inspector literally is his own business."

Patel has already sold four franchise locations – in Columbus; Charlotte, N.C.; Piscataway, N.J.; and Ocala, Fla. The franchise fee is \$15,000, which includes training in Cincinnati and at the franchise location.

In the first year in business, Patel said franchise owners can expect revenues of about \$50,000.

To maintain control over the quality of the franchise locations, Patel said he wants to limit openings to about five a year.