

Start-Up

Monday, January 2, 2006

Name: TireVan Corp

Location: Sterling

Funding: The company has raised \$500,000 from private investors and will be looking to raise an additional \$2 million in venture capital this summer.

Big Idea: TireVan provides a mobile tire installation service to consumers.



TireVan founders David Leslie, left, and Pat Garvey watch Aaron Gunnerson change a tire. The firm plans to expand beyond Northern Virginia.

Co-founders, co-presidents and partners David Leslie and Pat Garvey came up with the idea after each going through the time-consuming process of replacing tires on their cars. “The bad part is standing in the waiting area and trying to figure out if you’re being ripped off or not,” Leslie said of traditional tire purchasing. TireVan allows customers to browse, compare and select tires online or over the phone. Installation vans then come to the customer and swap the old tires for new ones. “We do 75 percent of our work at the customer’s office,” Leslie said.

How it works: All orders are processed through the TireVan web site, where customers can browse and select tires and choose when and where they want them installed. The installations typically occur within 48 hours. It takes an hour to do four tires on a standard car. TireVan can service vehicles ranging from Mini Coopers to dual-axle pickup trucks. At present, TireVan mostly serves Loudoun and Fairfax counties but also provides service to areas within 10 miles of Interstate 495.

Where the idea was hatched: Leslie and Garvey are both sports-car enthusiasts and veteran technology entrepreneurs who had bad experiences buying tires. Leslie had used a mobile windshield replacement to fix his car in 2003. When he needed to buy tires, he looked around for a similar service but couldn’t find one, so he and Garvey started their own.

Price: varies, depending on the tires chosen and difficulty of installation.

Founded: October of 2003. Operations began in January of 2005.

Who’s in charge: Leslie and Garvey

Employees: Six. Leslie hopes the company will grow to 35 to 40 by the end of 2006.

Web site: www.tirevan.com

Partners: TireVan partners with local companies to offer their service through employee discount programs. America Online Inc., Mitre Corp., Lockheed Martin Corp., Verizon Communications Inc. and Weichert Realtors, among others, are all participants.

What the name means: “We were partly inspired by a company that we felt was a good idea whose time never came called WebVan (a defunct online grocery delivery service), one of the classic dot-com bust stories,” Garvey said. “But we always considered TireVan to be everything that WebVan was not in terms of its ability to succeed and leverage the power of e-commerce.”

Where will you be in five years?: The company hopes to expand to the largest 50 cities in the United States beginning in late spring and early summer. The rate of expansion will be determined by how much financing the company receives. Baltimore and Philadelphia will be the first expansion targets, followed by Charlotte, Atlanta, and cities in Florida.

Quote: “They never see us. They go to work on old tires and go home on new tires, and they don’t do a thing except make a phone call,” Leslie said.

-- Andrea Caumont