

Company aspires to be 'Starbucks of wine'

Who doesn't love good, inexpensive wine?

A Tampa-based wine-retail company is betting you do.

Cork and Olive is negotiating lease agreements to open four wine shops in Bradenton and Sarasota where consumers can taste before they buy. The samples are free while the average price of its 100 bottle-plus selection is about \$12.

With eight corporate stores in operation, Cork and Olive is in the midst of an expansion and franchise plan that may boost the number of stores that are open or under construction to 13 by the end of the year.

The Bradenton-Sarasota



Tilde Herrera

It's Your Business

corridor could one day see 10 to 15 locations. By the end of 2007, the company plans to award the franchising rights for 200 to 300 locations in Florida before going nationwide.

"We're pretty ambitious," said **Stephanie Nelson**, the company's director of operations. "We want to be the

Starbucks of wine."

Interest in its franchising opportunity so far has been healthy; 30 people could be awarded franchising rights this year, said **Tom Ronzino**, chief executive officer of the Cork and Olive Franchise Corp.

"We have an overload of potential franchisees that have already gotten together with us," Ronzino said. "This just isn't a typical wine shop."

The focal point of each store is a round tasting table, where customers can sit and sample wines at no charge. Each shop, which averages 2,100 square feet, also sells glassware and olive oil. The majority of its customers are women and

those who would normally buy wine from supermarkets.

Aside from in-store sales, revenue also comes from in-home sales during events that resemble Tupperware parties. Cork and Olive also does corporate events that can be held in its stores or off-site.

The average franchisee investment is \$200,000, which includes all expenses, such as a \$45,000 franchise fee, construction

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