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Franchise guru

By ROSAMARIA MANCINI

The year he graduated from a Virginia law school, Harold Kestenbaum walked the streets of Manhattan hunting for a job at a law firm. His hard-nosed, in-your-face tactic worked because a city firm hired him, although he soon set out on his own as a solo practitioner specializing in franchise law.

Twenty years later, that Garden City franchise law business was booming and Kestenbaum decided it was time once again to join a firm.

"I had no one to give my practice to and my clients were always asking me who was going to take over when I retire," said Kestenbaum, 53. "My practice was getting so big and I needed help. I just knew it was time."

After weighing his options, including a move into Garden City-based Nixon Peabody, Kestenbaum said he found the "right fit" at Uniondale-based Farrell Fritz. In September, he officially joined Long Island's third largest law firm, which was pleased to receive his franchising expertise and client base.

"His practice of representing franchisors brings more business to the firm because his clients have other needs such as real estate, tax, labor and employment," said Charles Strain, Farrell Fritz's managing partner. "He assists in our goal of strengthening the firm."

Farrell Fritz is grooming a staff of attorneys to work along side Kestenbaum.

"It's (franchise law) the one and only thing I specialize in," said Kestenbaum, whose lengthy client list includes some of the largest franchise companies such as Nathan's Famous, Ranch 1, Lemon Tree, New World Coffee and Wall Street Deli.

His client's swear by him. Marc Shuman, president of Syosset-based Garage Tek, a garage organization



THE RIGHT FIT

After 20 years as a highly successful solo practitioner, Harold Kestenbaum decided to join Farrell Fritz, Long Island's third largest law firm.

franchiser, said Kestenbaum is "the premier franchise attorney."

"It's his sole focus, he's on the cutting edge and he's well known within the industry," Shuman said.

The industry, Kestenbaum said, is thriving because people are looking for less risky investments and many are turning to franchising.

A survey at Franchiseopportunities.com found that between 25 and 30 percent of new franchise owners are investors who've trimmed their stock market holdings.

"For the franchisor, it's a great vehicle to grow a business using someone else's money," Kestenbaum said.

Shuman agreed, adding that Garage Tek, which became a franchiser in March 2001, now has 48 franchisees in 29 states. Its franchises sell for \$50,000