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Franchise companies sell idea they weather downturns better

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L.A. Sunset Tan is targeting Washington to expand its business. So is Lenny's Sub Shop, a Memphis, Tenn.-based eatery with two 6-month-old stores in Fredericksburg, Va. And Nanny Poppinz out of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., wants to flood the Washington area with its child care referral service

and open opportunities for more women to work from home.

They are just a handful of some 300 businesses exhibiting April 11-13 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center for the 17th annual International Franchise Expo.

Sponsored by the D.C.-based International Franchise Association, the trade show expects to draw 8,000 to 10,000 participants.

Franchise officials are touting the sluggish

economy as a selling tool, saying franchises tend to be adverse to downturns because they offer investors proven options. They say consumers facing tight budgets are more likely to patronize a recognizable brand.

Lenny's Sub Shop, a Philadelphia-style eatery, hopes to open 10 stores each in Northern Virginia and D.C. over the next three years. For franchisees, it would mean about a \$250,000 investment, which includes a \$25,000 franchise fee.

L.A. Sunset Tan aims to open 25 salons each in Virginia and Maryland over the next five years. Its targets include Tysons Corner, Bethesda and Chevy Chase. Franchisees will pay \$250,000 to \$600,000, an investment

that includes the \$40,000 franchise fee.

Other franchises considering expansions in the Washington area include Roni Deutch Tax Center; Max Muscle, a sports nutrition company; and Foster's Grille, a neighborhood restaurant concept that already has locations in Virginia and Maryland.

Nanny Poppinz, a referral service for nannies, started franchising three years ago, focusing on single-parent households and homes with two working parents. Today, the company — which also refers baby sitters, tutors and newborn specialists — has 22 franchises and two company-owned operations. A franchise requires a \$65,000 investment.

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