

Downturn in Eagle Ford could open door to new ventures



The door is closing on some oil and gas enterprises, particularly in the Eagle Ford Shale, with dropping fuel prices. But a window of opportunity might be opening up. Franchisors are looking for new business opportunities in the vast oil-rich region just south of San Antonio.

Record low oil prices have meant layoffs, but some entrepreneurs attending the [International Franchise Association Convention](#) at the [Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center](#) think a downturn might be the right time to start a new business.

The more than 3,000 attendees at the conference — featuring hundreds of booths — spent the past few days networking, learning and looking for deals.

As the event wrapped up on Tuesday morning, one thing was clear: Any situation can become a business opportunity.

[Mark Cunningham](#) with the Toronto-based Smokes Pouterie said his restaurant chain successfully expanded in Calgary, Edmonton and other areas of Canada's oil-rich "Tar Sands" region.

Cunningham said their franchisees had been employed in the oil sector, but faced a critical decision on whether to stay or leave the market.

In the end, the employees decided to stay, put up part of their savings and finance the rest to start a new franchise. Cunningham said it ending up being a profitable move.

"People still need to eat and the lease costs have dropped, I'd say by about 30 percent," Cunningham said, noting that it's a good time to secure real estate.

"One of the things that we're finding is that availability in this market is better than it has been for the past five years," Cunningham said.

Leonard and [Mila Verkhoglaz](#) with New Jersey-based Executive Home Care recently secured a franchise in San Antonio where franchisees Solomon and [Valerie Rueda](#) are hoping to open in June or July.

[Leonard Verkhoglaz](#) said costs to set up a franchise for his home health care company are lower than restaurants and he's seeing growing demand.

[Mila Verkhoglaz](#) said their company also opened a franchise in Dallas and are looking to expand further in Texas.

"Texas is a great area for business," she said.

Other companies like the Waco-based Young Chef's Academy are franchising and finding success in the Alamo City.

Young Chef's Academy Founder Julie Burleson said a franchisee recently opened a location in the Stone Oak area of northern San Antonio.

With 35 locations, the company is looking at expanding franchise opportunities in Texas and the rest of the United States, Burleson said.

Young Chef's Academy President [Roger Schmidt](#) said franchising is a good opportunity in today's economy.

"It's a huge segment of our society in the United States," Schmidt said. "It represents 14 percent of our GDP. That's \$1 trillion."