

March 5, 2009

ROAD TRIP!

Heard of the cool new **Sonic** burger drive-in chain? You will. A **franchisee** planning to open **40 stores** in the DC area and his retail broker set out last week to view potential sites: 19 hours, 700 miles and two road-side lunches later we caught up with them.



John Platten has several Sonic franchises in Denver and five in the Tidewater region. Now he wants to open **between 40 and 50** in the greater DC area over the next 12 to 18 months, slated to be development deals, **\$500,000 to \$1M per unit**. The first drive-in will probably be in a VA suburb like **Manassas, Gainesville, or Frederick**, John says. When they open, he'll be counting on his operations staff in Richmond to get them running. Until then, John will be a de facto DC area resident, but has no plans to move from Denver. His wife, Rhonda, is a **rock-climbing buff**, which means "if I go, I would go alone."



John's sidekick was Green Light principal **Peter Framson**, a veteran of many such trips. Last Wednesday they toured Prince William, Fairfax, and Prince George's; on Thursday they hit Montgomery, Washington County, Frederick, and Loudoun. They still have more to look at, Peter says: "at least several more days of driving." Peter's a veteran of these road trips and has come up with a formula for success: identify your client's **trip personality** ASAP. "Some people are high energy and want to keep moving, some like to nap in between sites, some are **hypoglycemic** and are bears if you don't feed them every two hours."