

Friends start junk-hauling franchise despite recession

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By SHERYL JEAN / The Dallas Morning News

When Taylor Chalmers graduated from Southern Methodist University last spring, he was lucky to land a job at a Dallas oil and gas brokerage firm.



MONA REEDER/DMN

Taylor Chalmers (left) and Rhys Williams of College Hunks Hauling Junk remove old carpet from a storage unit.

Six months later, he realized an office cubicle wasn't for him.

So, he and childhood friend Oliver Blodgett, who graduated from Georgetown University in December, decided to open their own business. In March, they became the 17th franchisee – and the first in Texas – of Tampa, Fla.-based College Hunks Hauling Junk.

Tough economic times can spark the entrepreneurial spirit, according to a recent study by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. The study found that more than half of the companies on the 2009 *Fortune* 500 list began in a recession or bear market.

Franchisees of 4-year-old College Hunks Hauling Junk range in age, but lately it has attracted interest from a younger crowd as the job market has become more competitive, spokeswoman Maria Storto said.

Chalmers and Blodgett, who both majored in economics, liked the franchise idea because it's a proven strategy with a strong brand. College Hunks Hauling Junk's orange and green trucks are hard to miss.

Customer Melony George spied their truck in downtown Dallas one day, checked them out and liked their prices. Last week, she paid Chalmers, Blodgett and a new employee less than \$400 to empty a storage room rented by her employer in 95-degree heat.

Chalmers, 23, and Blodgett, 24, used family inheritances for about \$50,000 in start-up costs and financed a truck. Their office is in a house they share with two roommates.

The duo does about a dozen jobs a week. About 60 percent of the goods are recycled and the rest goes to the landfill.

Chalmers and Blodgett spend a lot of time clearing clutter from houses and garages, with some surprises, such as a rattlesnake found under some old sheds in Arlington.

Support from the two college buddies who started College Hunks Hauling Junk was a big draw for Chalmers and Blodgett, who have the founders on speed dial.

"It's going into business for yourself but not by yourself," Blodgett said. "The thought of going into something completely new was slightly ominous."