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In Brittany, France, expats have found a relaxed lifestyle...and business opportunities.

various risks. Here my equity has gone up. I'm concerned for the U.S. and now I've got more personal options. But I still can't wait to go home for Christmas at my parents' house."

Advice? "Spend some time in your potential new home town before you commit," says Cole.

"I want to stay here and put a few years into the hostel. In a few years' time, who knows? Perhaps I will go in search of new opportunities in new places. If I stay here and my taste changes, maybe I'll swap out my apartment in Medellín for a little *finca* in the middle of nowhere, or a little cabin along a quiet beach."—Lee Harrison

#### "Working for Yourself is Hard to Beat"

Name: Sally Stone

Age: 50's

Living in: Brittany, France

Business: Property management

Sally Stone and her former husband Mervyn were searching for superb scenery and a relaxed pace of life when they bought a small stone cottage in Brittany, on the Atlantic coast of France.

At the time, Sally was working as a director in a marketing company; their Breton cottage just a part-time retreat. But a year later, in 2002, Sally lost her job to cost cutting and needed to find something else.

The couple's cottage needed renovation when they bought it and the work they were doing on their own French home sparked an idea. Sally had no experience

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starting a business, but that wasn't going to stop her. The couple bought the neighboring cottage to make a bigger permanent home from which they could run the business—a full property-management service that could turn its hand to anything. They moved to Brittany full-time and their business, *Les Bons Voisins* (LBV), "the Good Neighbors," was born.

"We started out caretaking second homes for people," Sally says. "But we soon found ourselves tackling all kinds of problems from removing hornets' nests to tracking down elusive shades of paint." LBV became a one-stop-shop for people who wanted to feel secure about their home when they weren't there.

Sally had to battle with French bureaucracy to set up the business. "I found it hard to explain what our business actually did, since there wasn't a category it fitted into easily. I made countless visits to government offices to get the business off the ground. But problems are also opportunities. I learned French while sitting in dusty waiting rooms, so it had an upside." The rules have relaxed somewhat

since then, and you can now register certain types of small business on the Internet.

Sally had always thought the LBV business model could work anywhere in France. More than 300,000 foreigners own second homes in France so the market was already there. The profile of people moving to France full-time has changed over time, too. Younger people seeking a better lifestyle are moving in but need a source of earned income.

People thinking of providing similar services in other parts of France contacted Sally and Mervyn and the franchising idea took off. The trickle of franchisees became a flow and Sally has overseen 55 franchise start-ups in total. Today LBV looks after more than 1,000 properties owned by clients of all nationalities.

Franchising is well regarded in France since it is highly regulated and offers reasonable protection to franchisees. Sally is keen to make sure the business is right for would-be franchisees. "We also give them an intensive training course. Our package enables them to get their business started within six weeks." Normally, it takes much longer in France. The central office in Brittany provides ongoing support to franchisees and access to LBV's network.

Sally's can-do approach extends throughout that LBV network. "Our motto is 'no job too small, no project too large.' Clients know that when they arrive for a relaxing vacation they won't find a leaking roof or waist-high weeds in the garden." Part of the LBV ethos is to use French *artisans* (tradesmen) wherever possible to carry out specialist work. Sally says this is a win-win situation: French tradesmen get business while clients boost their standing with the French by using local labor.

Sally's advice for people thinking of working in France is to do their research first. It's not easy to get a job if you don't speak French and starting a business from scratch is hard work. Setting up as a franchisee can be a solution. "We don't expect LBV franchise to be bilingual, but they will need to get a good grasp of French.

"Do I miss my company Mercedes and power suit? Occasionally, on a bad day. But living in a wonderful place and working for yourself is hard to beat." You can contact Sally about franchising opportunities via her website: [Lbvfranchise.com](http://Lbvfranchise.com).—Vanessa Couchman ■