

## Waking up to a bright new day

LARRY MILLER has made a great living by taking care of his customers when they sleep.

The president, CEO and famed TV pitchman for Sit 'n Sleep mattress stores — “We’ll beat anyone’s advertised price or your mattress is ... FREEEEEE!” — started the business with his late father, Phil, in 1980 when they opened their first store in Culver City. It wasn’t until 1993 when they moved to a much larger 58,000-square-foot superstore at a new Culver City location. A second store opened in Tarzana in 1997.

Slow but steady growth followed, and today, Sit 'n Sleep has 27 stores throughout Southern California, with two new stores coming — one to a location in Chino Hills and the second one near either Victoria Gardens or Ontario Mills.

“We’re hopefully going to open up those locations within the next 18 months at the most,” said Miller, 61, adding he’d like each to be 10,000 to 13,000 square feet. These planned stores follow the opening of three new locations in less than a year — in Santa Monica, Costa Mesa and Agoura.

Miller has faith that home values will rebound, building will pick up and folks will start buying again. He’s looking 10 to 20 years down the road.

“I have strong belief in the resilience of the Southern California economy. I’ve lived here my whole life,” said Miller, who was born and raised in Los Angeles and lives in Redondo Beach.



» Larry Miller, Sit 'n Sleep CEO

STORY BY AMY BENTLEY

PHOTO BY SCOTT SMELTZER

“ I take good care of my people, I treat people like family. We have single-digit turnover. ”

The recession and real estate downturn killed many weaker stores, while allowing Miller to negotiate long-term commercial leases for bargain prices.

"We realize the pie might not grow, we just want a bigger piece of the pie," he said.

Miller noted that his Upland location does well and sells many higher-end goods. Sit 'n Sleep stocks the nation's largest selection of mattresses, including every major brand. The stores also have body diagnostic machines to ensure the right mattress fit for each customer.

Miller reflected on his successful business strategy.

"When we grew our business, we grew slowly. I believe in being lean and not overspending. I believe in

advertising and I believe in not having debt. Debt would have crushed me. We owe nothing to anybody. I'd rather have a strong regional company than be spread out nationally. I've kept my nose clean and expenses down. I take good care of my people, I treat people like family. We have single-digit turnover."

The company has 300 full-time employees, and the two new IE stores would likely add six to nine jobs at each location plus additional positions for drivers, warehouse workers, customer service reps and others.

So, what about those wacky TV ads that made him the most recognized TV pitchman since Cal Worthington and his dog Spot?

Years ago, Miller started advertising on the radio. He didn't like the sound of the ads, so when someone suggested

he record them himself, he did.

In 1991, Miller took a risk and advertised on Howard Stern's radio show; business shot up 50 percent that year. He immediately re-invested some of the profits in TV advertising, and again, business boomed.

One day, Miller was selling a mattress to a customer who happened to ask how she knew she was getting the best price. Miller promised her a mattress at the best price, or her mattress would be free.

"It just stuck. I recorded it, and it just became an audio logo," he said. "We get a lot of feedback. People stop me all the time. It's kind of cool. I'm honored and appreciate it." Miller laughed and added, "Nobody would buy me a hot dog 30 years ago, and now I'm sort of famous. Only in America."



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