

Eddie Rivas opened his first Pro Image franchise location in 1996 in Santa Anita Fashion Park, Arcadia, Calif. He now owns eight stores.



# Sticking With What Works

Pro Image Sports franchise owner Eddie Rivas is strategically growing his retail chain.

By Jennifer A. Morrell, Contributing Writer

IT'S ALWAYS HEARTENING TO REALIZE that the American Dream still is alive and well. In the retail business, one doesn't have to look far to find the type of hard-working people who turn their dreams into realities. Such is the case with Eddie Rivas, owner of an eight-store Pro Image franchise in California.

A native of Ecuador, Rivas' family moved to New York when he was 5 years old. A strong work ethic is woven into

the fiber of his family, and by the time he was in high school, Rivas was working at a Key Food grocery store. There, he gained merchandising experience. Like most motivated go-getters, Rivas used his experience to catapult himself forward in life.

"I was recruited by Keebler to work in sales, putting myself through college at night," Rivas says. "I eventually moved into management before changing

industries to pharmaceutical sales."

In 1993, Rivas and his wife, Daisy, moved to California. It was during this phase of life that he knew he wanted to be his own boss. His goals were mirrored by an equally ambitious Daisy, who also had worked her first job — in retail — while in high school. Like her husband, she had financed her own college education, all while gaining valuable retail-buying experience.



## GETTING THE BALL ROLLING

The Rivases began their path to business ownership by visiting a franchise convention. At first, they did not find any appealing opportunities. As fate would have it, they spotted an ad for a sports franchise in *Entrepreneur* magazine, which was being distributed to convention attendees.

"Leveraging all our retail experience, my sales-management background and my passion for sports, we decided to pursue a business partnership with Pro Image," Rivas says. "Shortly after we started the process, we welcomed our first child in October 1995. We decided at that time that I would focus my attention on the business."

Rivas opened his first store in June 1996 in Santa Anita Fashion Park, Arcadia, Calif., and his second store in Montclair in 1998. "During our start-up, I continued to work two jobs — working 15 hours a day — for the next three years. I finally left my sales position after we opened our third store at the Lakewood Center Mall in 1999," he says.

Opening a first location represented clearing a significant hurdle, but growth — if it were to happen — would involve strategy.



"We spent two years learning the franchise business and understanding the industry before opening our next store [in] Montclair," Rivas says. "Over the next 16 years, we opened six more locations, some with temporary kiosks or locations during seasonal business."

Today, Rivas is CEO and president of Rivas Sports Inc., the company he established as a Pro Image franchisee. Each location has store, assistant and shift managers. Daisy Rivas recently joined the company full time and will be responsible for product buying and merchandising.

The main strategy through the years has involved considering real estate, examining leases, watching local team sports trends and measuring the retail environment. Rivas says the benefit of having a store located within a mall

is the ability to capture the window-shopping consumer.

Conversely, a mall location can be challenging when foot traffic is down. Rivas' franchise grew quickly because he established a strong operations foundation, which he built by being involved in the business' sales, payables, buying and back room, and being intimately knowledgeable about each aspect.

As everything in retail centers on merchandising, Rivas constantly must evaluate his methods. Pro Image's corporate staff provides merchandising tips, but does not mandate the practices that franchise owners incorporate.

"It has truly been an understanding of the industry and our local market that has been one of our strengths," Rivas says. "First, we have high standards for providing an overall shopping experience. We highlight seasonal sports, key players, new items and sports trends — all in a well-maintained and fresh-looking store."

Located in malls, Rivas' stores are open every day, except holidays, with malls typically being open from 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Store sizes range between 1,200 and 2,500 square feet in size.

Rivas stays true to the Pro Image core, which includes selling sports apparel, novelty items and jerseys. "I tell my customers we are 100% in this business," he says. "We don't sell washers or DVDs. We are a true licensed sports fan shop."

Unique to his stores, compared to local competitors, is the fact that he stocks a vast assortment of player merchandise from key national teams.

"We have been very successful in building our cap business, with unique styling, and our women's business, which has grown to represent almost 15% of our business."

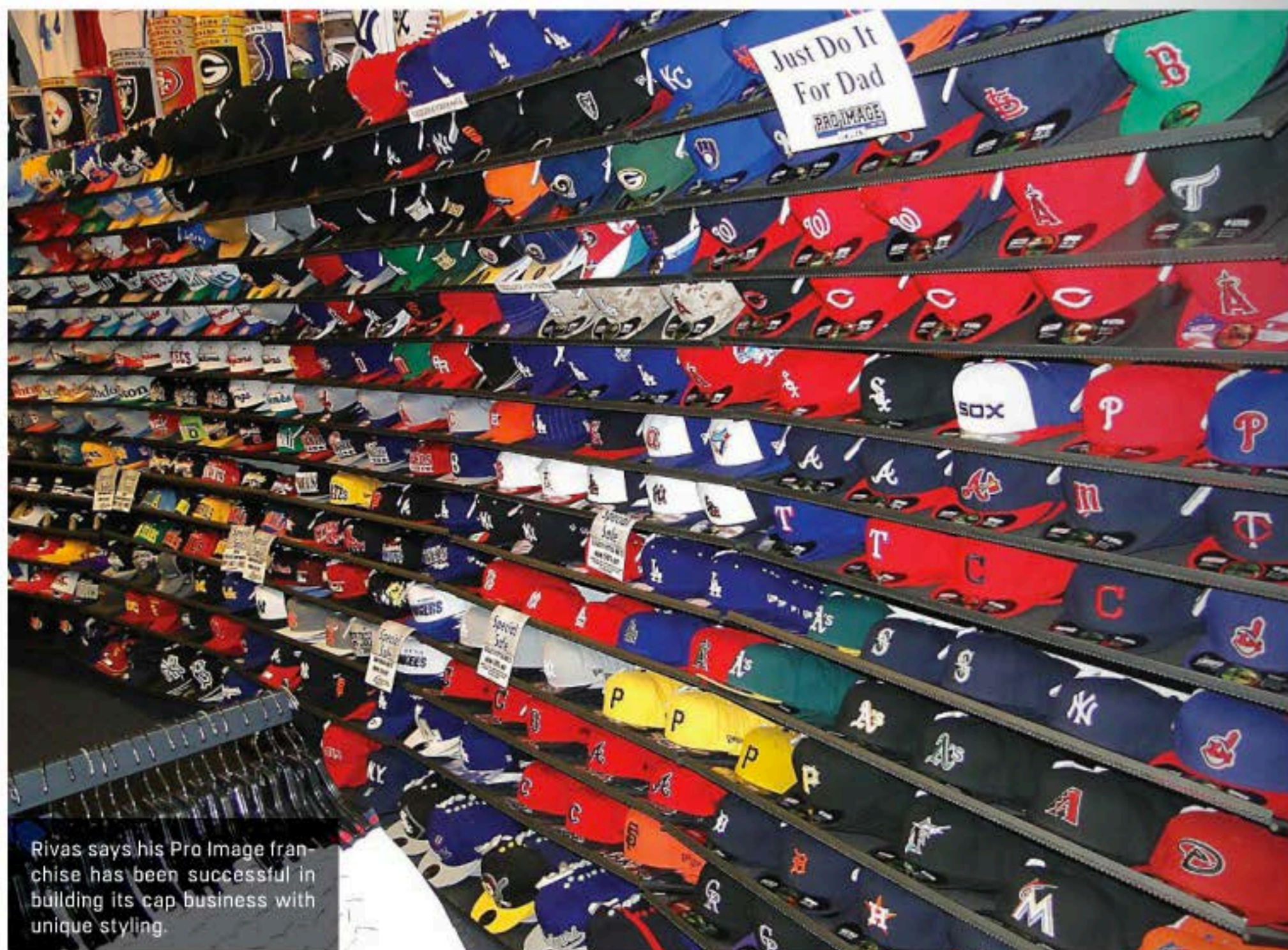
The majority of Rivas' customer base is comprised of Los Angeles Dodgers, Angels, Lakers and Clippers fans. Since Los Angeles doesn't have an NFL team, Rivas' stores cater to eight to 10 key professional football teams.

"The top three teams we cater to are the San Francisco 49ers, the Dallas Cowboys and the Oakland Raiders," he says. "Our



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Rivas says his Pro Image franchise has been successful in building its cap business with unique styling.

NHL business has started to increase with the success of the L.A. Kings.”

### SPREADING THE WORD

Marketing his stores throughout the year and from season to season can be tricky, but Rivas says the best method includes teaming up with others in the community.

“We partner with mall management to be included in community events,” he says. “Each respective manager partners with

local businesses to support local teams.”

In the age of social media, deciding on the best platforms to use can be difficult. Rivas uses Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to drive his franchise’s brand and disseminate information to his customers. Tactics include posting pictures of the newest, hottest items via these social media outlets. He also offers downloadable coupons for customers.

Rivas says he has received some traffic

from Pro Image’s website, but he tends to market more specifically to the local consumer fan base. “Advertising is very expensive and we have received poor return on our investments,” Rivas says. “We do a fair amount of in-store coupons and use the mall’s website to promote our stores. We also rely on our customer service to keep our customers returning to our stores.”

Rivas has ambitious plans for his franchise’s future, including opening three additional locations by the second quarter of 2015. His team also will be developing a new concept for its flagship location, which is scheduled to be remodeled next year. 📺

## Pro Image (Rivas Sports Inc.) At A Glance

**Company Name:** Pro Image Sports

**Address:** 400 S. Baldwin Ave., Ste. 311, Arcadia, CA 91007

**Store Hours:** Monday-Saturday: 10 a.m.-9 p.m.; Sunday: 11 a.m.-8 p.m.

**Year Opened:** 1996

**Phone:** (626) 445-6635

**Items Carried:** Sports apparel and novelty items

**Website:** proimagesports.com

**Facebook:** proimagesportsstore

**Instagram:** proimagesportsla

*Jennifer A. Morrell is an award-winning writer who has written for a number of national consumer and trade publications. For more information or to comment on this article, email Jennifer at jennmorrell@hotmail.com.*