

Debi Scroggins says the aha! moment came when she was in Pennsylvania, scouting for new sites for **Bearclaw Coffee Co.** “The rents out east were so astronomical that specialty coffee just couldn’t support it,” says Scroggins, Bearclaw’s president. So what about the coffee without the rent—in the form of a traveling espresso truck?

By November, Bearclaw had three orange Dodge Sprinters working Washtenaw County. I chased one down on Jackson Road one Friday and caught up to franchisee Gregg Horn in the parking lot at the BMW dealership—one of his regular stops. A former heavy-equipment operator, Horn said he couldn’t believe how well the business had taken off in the four weeks he’d had the van on the road. Weekdays from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. he runs down Jackson from Baker to Maple; evenings and weekends he hits sporting events and festivals, selling hot and cold drinks, bagels, pastries, and muffins.

Horn’s van underwent a \$25,000 retrofit that includes a stainless-steel galley kitchen and state-of-the-art coffee machine that lets him pull 300 espressos an hour. There’s also a touchscreen register that keeps track of in-

ventory and speeds payment. Scroggins says the next generation of vans will be fitted with global positioning so that customers can follow a van’s location online and email orders before the next stop. She expects to expand the fleet to the high-rent East Coast market and beyond, and to have a van on the floor of the international franchise expo in Washington, D.C., next spring.

The indie **Portofino Coffee**, across from Westgate shopping center, also put a van on the road this fall. Jason DeWolfe teamed with Portofino owner JoAnn Campbell to buy an outfitted GM utility truck from Colorado Coffee in Howell when it went out of business. Portofino spiffed up the vehicle with the company logo and put it on the road with DeWolfe as driver-barista. Now he hits office buildings like 414 South Main and construction sites such as Skyline High School with a full range of coffee drinks, frappes, and pastries. DeWolfe is on the road weekdays from 6 a.m. till noon and also works all the Michigan home games from a prime spot at the corner of Stadium and Main. A big chunk of the proceeds from those sales goes to the Pioneer Athletic Booster Club.

—B.E.