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Three Louisville childcare centers sold to new-to-market entrepreneurs

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Charles Kim and Andres Patiño, two first-time founders, have always wanted to pursue an impactful entrepreneurial endeavor. With backgrounds in finance, they found a shared vision in early childhood education and just had to find the right place to bring their ideas to life.

That's ultimately what brought them to Louisville, where they have recently acquired three local childcare centers under their new company, Early Bird Education Group.

Kim, a Korean native who grew up in Los Angeles, went to Georgetown University for business before working in various finance roles in New York. While attending Harvard Business School, Kim said he started combing through entrepreneurial ideas before landing on the childcare sector.

"I grew up in a single parent household and so we had to rely on childcare and after-school services growing up," he said. "I knew firsthand how critical this service is for families. From a business



CHRISTOPHER FRYER

Early Bird Education Group co-founders Andres Patino, left, and Charles Kim pose for a portrait in East Louisville. The entrepreneurs recently moved to Louisville to establish the early childcare group, and have acquired three local childcare centers including Bright Start Childcare & Preschool, Lyndon Learning Childcare and Children's Academy Childcare & Preschool.

standpoint we thought it was a good opportunity — there's a huge demand for high-quality early childhood education and after school services that is never going to go away and it's only getting tougher and tougher for families during Covid-19."

Patiño, originally from Miami, graduated from Cornell University and met Kim through a mutual friend. He had always dreamed of owning a small business and left his career in finance in 2017 to start an operational role to get a better grasp of business ownership.

After finding a partner that he trusted in Kim, Patiño told me he also felt drawn to the childcare industry as his parents were both blue-collar workers that needed on those services. It's a service that everyone can agree is needed in society, he added.

"I just wanted to join an industry where I felt like I could bring all these past experiences in finance and operations, implement them, and then add value," Patiño said. "Childcare met all of those criteria."

Kim and Patiño began talking with brokers in several different markets, looking for childcare centers that would be good acquisition candidates. They ended up finding three in Louisville — Bright Start Childcare and Preschool, Lyndon Learning Childcare and Children's Academy Childcare and Preschool — and fell in love with the city in the process.

The two co-founders, who moved to Louisville in January, told me they were drawn to the city not just for its hospitality, but also its strong middle class and centralized location from which to grow their new company's footprint.

"At first, we were looking in various regions," Kim said. "But what pulled us into this market were the specific centers we looked at, and of course, with our ambition to grow beyond our initial purchases, we wanted to choose a market that was economically viable as well as the cities surrounding Louisville that we could potentially get into down the road."

Between the three centers, Early Bird Education Group currently has more than 400 students enrolled from 250 families and about 60 employees.

The partners declined to disclose their total acquisition costs, but according to Jefferson County PVA records, they purchased the Lyndon property for \$475,000. The other two centers are located within shopping centers that are owned by a separate party.

Kim said the company's intention is to keep the unique culture and neighborhood identity that each facility has, versus combining everything under the same moniker or brand.

The partners will instead focus on adding value in the back office and operational front, where they plan to implement new technology and software to streamline once cumbersome processes, among other initiatives.

In the near future, Kim said the company will look to acquire one to two more centers or even build one of its own as they become more familiar with the different neighborhoods in Louisville. Eventually, Early Bird Education Group plans to create support staff over its various properties, with targeted investments in human resources.

"In our short time so far, our belief is that in this industry, it starts and ends with your teachers," he said. "If you can keep your teachers happy and motivated, that'll trickle down into quality care for your children, their families and ultimately the success of your centers."

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