

Engraving entrepreneurs etch their mark on community

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WOOD RIVER - Budget Signs, 333 E. Edwardsville Road, has been recognized as the River Bend Growth Association Business of the Month for December.

"We get business from other members (of the RBGA), and we really appreciate that," owner Patti Lash said. "The exposure that we get is great for our business. We have been members since we took over, and the previous owners were as well."

Budget Signs provides banners, vinyl lettering, engraving, T-shirts and hats, rubber stamps, logos and business cards. It also features a large inventory of trophies for sports, academics and performance events, from the elegant to the cartoonish.

"We are a full-service awards business," Patti said. "We do all engraving and trophy building, custom vinyl lettering, printed signs and banners in house. We have the ability to laser-engrave glass and acrylic, and we can engrave plastic industrial labels and signs.

"We are always up for a challenge, whether it be in signs or awards."

Patti said the business sees a combination of trophies, signs and awards go out the door.

"It really is divided pretty equally," she said. "We didn't realize for a while just how diversified we really are."

Twenty-seven years ago, original owners Dan and Geri Jones started the company in the basement of their home, moving the business to its current location in 1991. Patti Lash worked for the couple for seven years before purchasing the company herself, along with her husband, Steve, in July 2003.

"Dan and Geri were looking to sell," Patti said. "Steve and I found ourselves going through some changes in our lives, and we decided this would be the way to go for us."

Since taking over, the new owners have continued the quality of service the previous owners maintained while heading in new and exciting directions.

"In the last couple of years, we have added a wide-format digital printer so we can do full-color banners and signs, car magnets, window lettering, clothing and decals," Patti said. "We have also added a sublimation printer so we can add full-color graphics to plaques, clipboards, cutting boards, even cake pans."

A laser provides engraving on wood for wine boxes, tool boxes, baseball bats, even pistol grips and frames.

Steve said Budget Signs can provide everything needed to put on a car show, including the banners, signs, trophies, plaques, shirts and dash plaques.

"We can take care of an entire event, whether it is a car show, baseball tournament or swap meet," he said.

While other sign and engraving companies often serve as a kind of "middleman," Steve said his business prefers to be involved in every aspect of the customer's needs.

"About 95 percent of our business is done in-house," he said. "When people drive by our building, they don't have a clue as to what goes on inside. When they see what we do, they are shocked. We don't take an order and send it off for someone else to do. Another advantage to that is we can make adjustments right then and there. We don't have to ship it out and make our customers wait a week to get it back.

"We also do appointments if someone just cannot be here during the week."

He credits much of the company's success to the employees. If the staff seems to interact like family, it is due in part to the fact that the couple's son, Stephen Lash, and daughter, Kristen Orban, both work for the business, as well.

In all, eight workers make up the Budget Signs team.

"Our employees here are great, and they are really what make this business function," Steve said.

Budget Signs also was awarded the RBGA Business of the Month in December 2004. Patti says a tight business network interacting with the public is crucial to the success of the area.

"The ConocoPhillips core project has really helped the community," she said. "It has also been helpful with many of the contractors who use us for many of their sign needs.

"We appreciate the public for shopping locally. We need them to boost our local economy."

Budget Signs is open 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, with extended hours during the summer. For information call (618) 259-4460 or visit the Web site at www.awardsbybudgetsigns.com.