

Just call 'em a couple of big dreamers

Founders of roof coating firm win Arizona Small Business Association's Dreamer award

By MONICA WARREN

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Photos by VAL CAÑEZ/Tucson Citizen

What began in 1993 as a 2,500-square-foot warehouse with two employees has grown into a company with 16 employees, 18,000 square feet of manufacturing space and clients across the Southwest.

For that, Elastek owners Richard and Janice Ulrich received the American Dreamer award today from the Arizona Small Business Association.

Richard Ulrich formed the company in 1993 after deciding "I didn't want to work for somebody else anymore."

Ulrich was chief operating officer of then-Tucson-based AlphaGraphics, and when the company was sold that year, Ulrich lost his job. Instead of looking for a position with another corporation, he decided to go into business for himself.

He spent a year investigating various opportunities and eventually settled on elastomeric coatings, a resin-based material from which Elastek makes its products. Ulrich said the company has experienced so much growth because the extreme heat of the Southwest creates an "urban heat island" that can degenerate new roofs in a matter of months. Using Elastek coating can reduce a roof's temperature from 180 degrees to 110 degrees, he said.



Danny Samorano makes a batch of roof coating, an elastomeric product made by Elastek.

The company's original clients were contractors and "do-it-yourself" remodelers, said Janice Ulrich. Elastek products currently are sold in major retail stores, such as ACE Hardware and Sherwin Williams, and roofing supply stores throughout Tucson and in parts of New Mexico and western Texas.

The company's gross revenue grows about 15 percent every year, she said.



Rick and Janice Ulrich, owners of Elastek, set out to run a business where employees could learn new skills, and have fun. The Ulriches are winners of the Arizona Small Business Association's American Dreamer award.

Success is not the only criteria for The American Dreamer award. It is given to business owners who exemplify "the drive of American entrepreneurship and make dreams reality by sharing their vision, innovating and overcoming adversity," said ASBA Southern Arizona Director Charlie O'Dowd.

"He (Ulrich) found a niche and he's been able to market it directly to the public and also on a wholesale level," he said.

Janice Ulrich and her husband set out to build a company where employees would have an opportunity to grow and learn skills, all while working in a fun environment, she said. "At the end of the day, we'd like to have something of value we can pass along to the employees."

"I've worked a lot of places and this is the best place I've ever worked," said Bonnie Lewis, who has known Janice Ulrich for five years and has worked as Elastek's marketing director for the last year and a half.

The Ulriches "go the extra mile for employees and we'd all do just anything for them," she added. "They really care for the community and the environment."



Construction continues on a new storage facility for Elastek, 3700 S. Palo Verde Road.