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Appetite for education drives Pennsylvania



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ZEBBY SULECKI HAS A distinctive philosophy when it comes to customer service.

“Customers are doing us a favor by giving our company a chance,” he says. “Our pledge to them is to deliver the highest value possible, while we transform their business or living environment, and leave the stress to us.”

By following the belief that you have to earn your customers’ respect by keeping them a top priority, Sulecki has built his business from a one-man shop to a 60-person firm. His company, Zebby Sulecki Inc., has set high standards in the painting industry and won dozens of awards as a result.

Some of their many recognitions include Best Commercial Project, Best Institutional Project, Best Restoration/Renovation Project and Best Multi-Unit Residential Project awarded by Associated Builders & Contractors, Inc. (ABC). In addition, Zebby Sulecki, Inc. received the 2007 Specialty Contractor of the Year award presented by ABC, and is nominated again as a finalist for 2009.

“Our painters have a greater sense of pride for all the recognition of the projects we do,” says Barb O’Donnell, Controller. “It is very rewarding to be honored by our industry peers.”

“Our employees are the key to the company’s success,” Sulecki says. “Working together as a team, we have developed our Values, Vision and Mission Statement, which is a commitment to both ourselves and our customers. *Integrity* in our actions and our words, *commitment* to our company, our team members, our customers, and our community, *caring* by mutual respect and support, *clarity* of communication, and *consistency* in dependable actions that lead to reliable and trusting relationships. These are the values that guide us in our success and enable us to provide the level of professional excellence our customers expect and deserve.”



Smart investments

Sulecki begin his business career in his home country of Poland, where he owned and operated his own auto repair shop. After immigrating to the U.S. in the 1980s, he found work as a mechanic for Audi and Volkswagen. A career turning point came when the decision came to make a \$12,000 investment in automotive tools. "I took a hard look at it and decided that I would make that investment in a down payment on my house instead," Sulecki says.

Looking for a new trade, he worked as a painter for a local company for a year. Using his entrepreneurial skills, he then started his own business, painting houses day, nights and weekends, and soon had built a reputation for honesty, integrity and quality workmanship – qualities that remain the cornerstone for his business today. This was the kind of work ethic that helped grow the company.

After working in the residential field for five years, though, Sulecki realized he needed to make some changes to take his business to the next level. "There is only so much growth when one person is the painter, the estimator, the project manager and the salesman," he says. "Residential customers require and deserve a lot of time and it's hard to take on big projects when you are working on your own."

Sulecki put his efforts into learning about commercial estimating and reading blueprints so he could start bidding and landing commercial jobs. He was then able to grow his team as more work and larger projects came in. Today the firm employs 50 painters and 10 office staff and is trusted with some of the biggest commercial, educational and health care facility coating projects in the Philadelphia area.



PREFERRED PRODUCTS

COMMERCIAL PROJECTS: ProMar200 Interior Latex

GREEN PROJECTS: ProGreen 200 Interior Latex

Above left: Zebby Sulecki and a crew of seven painters volunteered two weeks of their time to help rebuild the Hancock County Child Development Center in Bay St. Louis, Miss., after Hurricane Katrina. Sherwin-Williams donated all the paint. Above right: Faux marble columns at a New Jersey catering facility.

One job he and his painters are particularly proud of is the Rotunda at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. The eight-story atrium at the rotunda required creative scaffolding staging. Countless layers of paint had been applied over the decades, and the latest coat was failing. Consequently, all the built-up coatings had to be carefully removed. Sulecki's Sherwin-Williams sales rep, Bob Coccia, tested the wall and found a pH problem in the plaster. To combat that, he recommended a system of masonry conditioner and a pre-catalyzed waterborne epoxy primer to ensure proper topcoat bonding. That's just one example of how his Sherwin-Williams rep has been instrumental in his company's success, Sulecki says.

"We've been pretty lucky," he explains. "We have the best rep in the business, with more than 30 years of experience. Any problems we have, he finds solutions. In fact, he finds solutions before we have problems." **PPC**

ZEBBY SULECKI INC.

Newtown Square, Pa.

Founded 1986

60 employees

BUSINESS MIX:

80% commercial

20% residential

WEBSITE:

zsipainting.com

Painter to Painter: What advice do you have for younger paint company owners who want to grow their business?



"You have to believe in educating yourself," says Zebby Sulecki (left). "You need to keep learning new things all the time, not just about painting, but about everything. We constantly give our employees opportunities to go to seminars and workshops in management training, etc. We also bring in business advisors to help us improve the company. You have to keep learning new things so you can compete."

Adds chief estimator James Kucera: "We get asked for advice a lot. I don't know if there is a magic potion. In reality, it's just a lot of hard work."