

**Arthun  
Painting Inc.**

Anchorage, Alaska  
Founded 2007  
38 employees

**BUSINESS MIX:**  
95% commercial  
3% residential repaint  
2% other

*Nation's largest state deman*

Thinking **BIG**

# *ds super-sized coatings solutions*



**A**sk David Arthun what sets his painting company apart from the competition, and he doesn't hesitate with an answer. It's the ability to staff a large job and make life easy for the general contractor.

"Our No. 1 priority is and always has been to do our job so well that the general contractor never has to worry about the painting portion of their project," he says.

That's a fitting mission for a commercial coatings company dealing with all the challenges that come with being located in the nation's largest – and most remote – state. Nothing in Alaska makes life easy for painters, from the weather to the cost of living to the difficulty of shipping goods and products.

Arthun Painting had a chance to prove its worth recently when it won the bid for the new \$111 million Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center in downtown Anchorage – the state's largest commercial job in years.

Not only did the 215,000 square foot facility require a lot of paint – more than 7,400 gallons in all, applied by crews of up to 14 painters working over a 10-month period – but it was full of coatings challenges as well.

A three-story open staircase, for example, prevented the use of scaffolding to paint the 142-foot-high lobby ceiling. So Arthun Painting rented a 125-foot boom, and the work had to be done during

a short window of opportunity before the exterior walls were in place. More lifts were needed to reach ceilings and skylights. The smaller lifts could be transported on freight elevators, but the large ones required cranes, and scheduling was crucial as Arthun spent about \$69,000 in all to rent lifts for the project.

Prepping the three-story main lobby concrete columns was one of the thorniest coatings problems. A special sanding belt was needed to conform to the columns, and had to be operated from a diesel-powered air compressor, causing additional labor and expenses. The use of single-component Sherwin-Williams Corothane I Aliphatic Finish Coat helped keep labor costs down by eliminating the usual two-part urethane system while providing excellent adhesion and resistance to yellowing, chalking and UV damage.

Specialty products like this – along with high-quality everyday coatings like ProMar 200 Interior Latex and low-VOC ProGreen 200 – are among the reasons Arthun chooses Sherwin-Williams as his paint supplier.

“Customer service and product availability are two major reasons to buy,” he says. “When we call

in an order, we don’t have to worry if it’s going to be filled correctly. Alaska is 10 days out on any freight shipments from the Lower 48. Sherwin-Williams has multiple stores in the state and that helps alleviate product concerns. They’re able to transfer product from one store to another if they run out at one location. That’s something the competition just can’t offer.”

With a solid paint supplier in place and two years of managing the company under their belts, the future looks encouraging to Arthun and his wife and co-owner Kayce.

“The first few months were stressful, and taught us a lot about managing cash flow and payroll,” he says. Hiring a full-time office manager and three more estimators (a fourth will be added in 2009) allowed the company to double sales in two years.

“That’s a huge part of our growth. It allows us to bid more jobs and manage our projects more efficiently,” Arthun says. “Commercial painting is an extra risky game here, so you have to run a pretty tight ship. We pull P&Ls weekly on every job and are constantly looking at ways to improve. That’s what keeps us in business.” **PPC**

*David Arthun (bottom left) parlayed his experience as a Sherwin-Williams sales rep into a new career as a painting contractor when he bought Nordine Painting in 2007. A smooth transition was ensured when former owner Dana Nordine (bottom right) continued as Arthun’s project manager for two years, until his retirement in December.*

## Painter to Painter: David Arthun answers our questions about his business philosophy.

### Are you a native Alaskan?

I grew up in Montana, but have been here since 2000. My dad was a rancher, and my mom

was a schoolteacher. The military and oil were the two driving forces that brought me to Anchorage.

### Did you learn anything from them that has helped you in running your business?

Probably the most important lesson my dad taught me was that every job is important, no matter how big or small. The \$5,000 job is just as important as a \$50,000 or a \$500,000 job. They all work together to bring in revenue.

### You worked as a paint salesman for Sherwin-Williams before buying your own painting contracting firm. What business lessons did you take away from that experience?

I learned a lot from a Sherwin-Williams guy from Ohio named Dave Ryan. He taught me a lot about the basics of business that has carried over. He always talked about the necessity of high volume. You have to do a lot of work to be successful. Don’t rely on a couple big customers.





***Arthun Painting used Duration Home on the walls of the Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center to ensure a long-lasting finish that would be easy to maintain and hold up to high traffic. Corothane I Aliphatic Finish Coat helped keep labor costs down on the columns with excellent adhesion and resistance to UV, yellowing and chalking.***

**What advice do you have for painters who'd like to own their own company?**

You have to enjoy the business end of it. I like business. It's a game, and it's a game I want to win. The P&L tells you if you're winning or losing. In the end, if you're not having fun playing the game, either switch the game or get out of it.