

Painting is in Steve Spinelli's blood. He picked up a brush at age 11, working for a company owned by his father. Today, with a staff of 13, he and his father tackle a wide array of commercial jobs at the helm of Uni Pro Painting. A recent, fairly typical day found crews at work at a pharmaceutical lab, medical clinic, fitness center, retail store and a commercial expansion job.

Getting Aggressive

Even with all of his current success, Steve hasn't forgotten the challenges of his start-up year in 1996. Besides launching Uni Pro Painting, he got married, bought his first house, and he and his wife had their first child.

"That was a whirlwind of a year," he says. "I thought if I could get through this, I could get through anything."

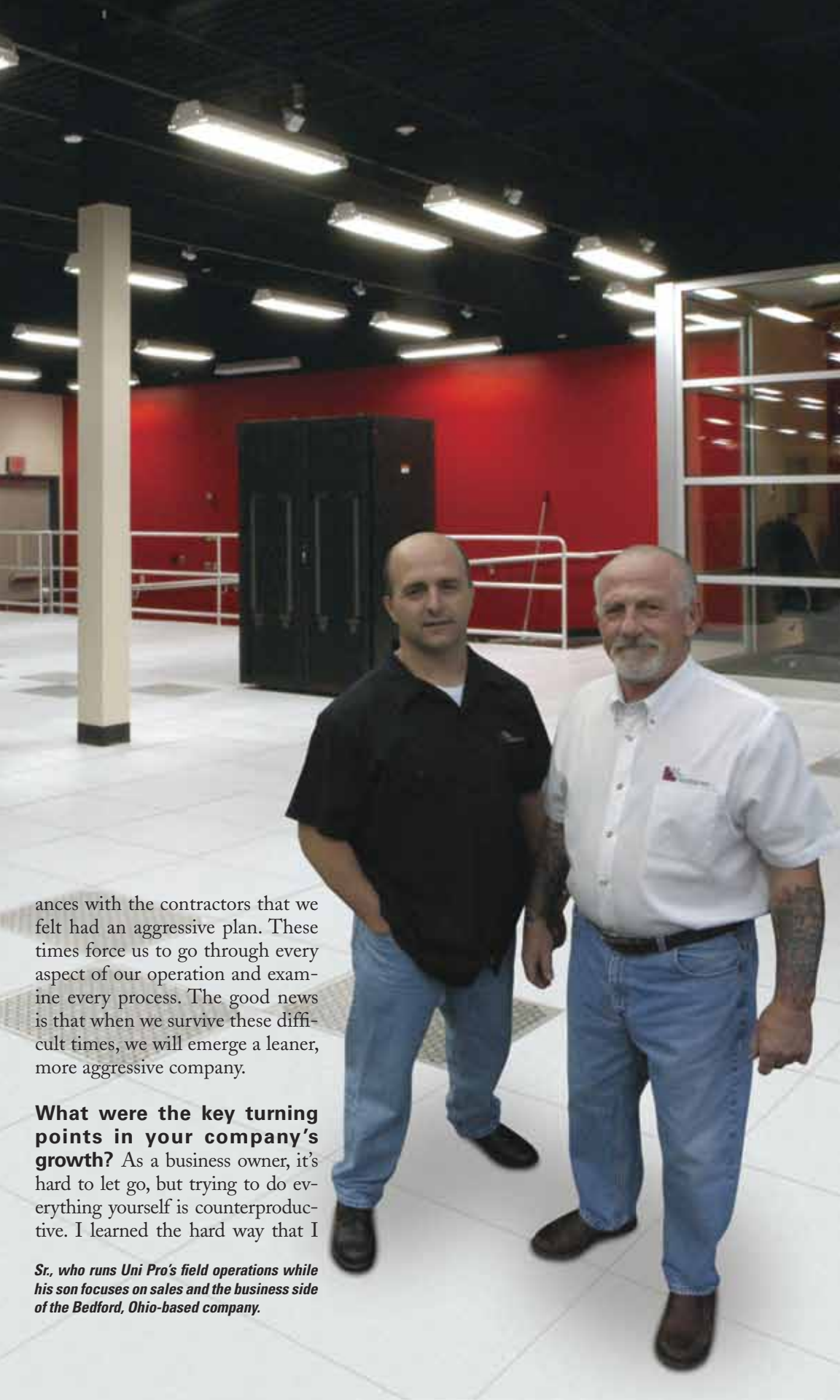
The Bedford, Ohio painters share their outlook for the new year, and offer advice for fellow commercial painting contractors.

How are you adapting to the current economic challenges?

It's impossible to conduct business like we did as little as two years ago. We've become more aggressive in going after work. If I see a construction dumpster, I stop to see who the general contractor is. If it's someone we'd like to work for, we get on the bidders list.

Last year, we talked to the general contractors we work with and asked them about their plans for pursuing new work. We then made a decision to strengthen the alli-

Painting the server room at the Expedient Data Center required covering all equipment with anti-static canvas dropcloths. Sherwin-Williams Waterborne Dry Fall Flat Black was used on ceilings; ProMar 200 on the walls. Steve Spinelli (left) learned the paint trade from his father, Steve Spinelli



ances with the contractors that we felt had an aggressive plan. These times force us to go through every aspect of our operation and examine every process. The good news is that when we survive these difficult times, we will emerge a leaner, more aggressive company.

What were the key turning points in your company's growth? As a business owner, it's hard to let go, but trying to do everything yourself is counterproductive. I learned the hard way that I

Sr., who runs Uni Pro's field operations while his son focuses on sales and the business side of the Bedford, Ohio-based company.



Uni Pro used Duration Home to achieve the signature pink and green colors of a Dots fashion store in Bedford.

needed to delegate more and surround myself with the right people. I've been extremely fortunate to be working side by side with my father. There is nobody better at running a job, or analyzing a project. Another important move was to get my wife to come to work for the company. Her years of experience in administration helped take us forward by establishing the infrastructure of the company. Within the last year, we added a second full-time estimator. This enabled us to increase our bid volume and allows me to focus on new business. Last, but certainly not least, I credit our crew. Over the years, we have built a solid team that represents us in the field. They share in our passion for the trade and are the face of our company.

Besides word-of-mouth referrals, do you do anything else to market and promote your company? We launched a new

website and recently began some radio advertising. We have been members of the Blue Book since 2002 and it has provided us great exposure with local companies, as well as contractors in our area. We work hard to maintain our customer base and stay in contact with them as much as possible. If you're not talking to your customers, someone else is.

What does your paint supplier mean to your business?

Sherwin-Williams has been a partner with us since the beginning. Their service is unparalleled and they are extremely innovative in developing new products to meet the demands of today. It's easy to judge the value of a supplier when everything is going right. The true measurement is how the company conducts itself when faced with adversity. Any time we ever had an issue,



our problems became their problems, and together we were able to get through it. From deliveries to project leads, our sales rep Joe Scott and the entire staff at the Solon Commercial Store have become an integral part of our operation.

Your passion also carries you through tough times and helps you persevere.

Second, always conduct yourself as a professional and lead by example. The way you conduct yourself with customers, suppliers, employees, etc., lets people know

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– Steve Spinelli, Uni Pro Painting

What’s your advice for other paint company owners?

First, be passionate. You need to pour 110 percent into your business and not look back. I guess I’m very fortunate, because I can get up in the morning and look forward to going to work and to the challenges that lie ahead.

what your company is about and what your values are. This is very important when you’re trying to create a reputation and develop a brand. **PPC**

See more photos of their work and read the full interview at unipropainting.com