

A & E Lawn Sprinkler

Michael and Tammy Ceroalo, Glen Bujak

Success Magazine: Why did you start your own business?

Michael Ceroalo: For three years I tried to get financing to purchase a lawn sprinkler company, but the banks would not loan us the money without a business plan. I contacted SUNY's SBA office and Kate Baker helped us write our business plan. She also advised us that buying the established sprinkler company was not viable and we would be better off starting our own business. I was also encouraged and supported by two friends I made over the years—Mr. Ed Santalone of Atlantic Irrigation Specialist, who said I had the drive and experience to make it on my own; and Ron Shelli, our financial advisor for three years who continuously helped me with bank loans and his contacts in the business.

SM: What did you learn from your prior work experience?

MC: I worked for Shaul Vegatable Farm in Schoharie County for twelve years. There I learned the meaning of hard work and the importance of treating customers and fellow workers with respect. I also worked for AJ Lawn Sprinkler for twenty-five years. I started out as a laborer and worked my way up to foreman; running the installation crew (sometimes two or three crews at once), training installers and service personnel, designing and pricing residential and commercial jobs (office buildings, ball fields, and golf courses), and ordering parts. I learned how to work on all equipment, large and small. My wife, Tammy, also worked for AJs on and off for twenty-five years, learning all the ins and outs of running a lawn sprinkler office.

SM: What is your market business plan both short and long term?

MC: Our short term goal year to year is to add fifty



new installation jobs a year and at least one hundred new service customers a year. We don't want to grow too fast and lose our ability to be hands on with the customer. We are building our business in Saratoga County (mostly in the Saratoga and Malta area) and plan on picking up business in the Albany-Tri County region in the coming years.

SM: As a small business owner, how has the recession affected you?

MC: People are staying home and working on their houses, so it has helped us. On the other hand, customers are looking for the best price, which we can supply due to our low overhead. We are also trying to do a neighborhood bonus program (everyone likes a discount). We aim to give great service at a fair price.

SM: What makes your company great?

MC: Our price and our customer service. With Glen and I involved in every project and responding

immediately to service calls, our customers don't have anything to be concerned with. We are totally hands on with customers before, during, and after the installation or service is complete.

SM: Who is your typical client?

MC: We are targeting housing developments and neighborhoods. If you sign a new customer for a sprinkler system, you can usually get at least two more customers on the same street. Word of mouth advertising is key. We are also targeting new and established commercial sites to service or install new systems into such as golf courses (I have worked on several over the years, even designing and building a pump to run the sprinkler system at Eagle Crest Golf Course). We are willing and able to water anything a customer might want or need watered. We have even designed and completed an installation in an indoor horse arena in the town of Galway.

SM: How will AMD affect your business?

MC: We are working across from the entrance of AMD on route 9 right now (at Park Place at Malta), so we will be seen by people (who will be working for AMD) moving into the area either building new houses or buying existing houses and will need lawn sprinklers or landscape lighting or security lighting. New businesses will be opening up and existing business will have more money to spend on landscaping.

We specialize in lawn sprinkler systems, landscape and security lighting, shallow wells (up to 30 feet, and pumps).

