



Siena Fence Co., Inc.

Owners: Chris & Andrea Litchfield, Seth Yates

Success Magazine: How do you define success?

Seth Yates: Loving what you do. Being able to go to work everyday and genuinely have fun.

Chris Litchfield: There are always going to be difficult days and stressful times in any business. Success is when you can step back and look at the big picture and the good outweighs the bad by a landslide.

SM: How did you become involved in this industry?

CL: Following my sophomore year at Siena, my roommate began working for a fence company. I had no summer job lined up at the time and decided to join him. I spent the rest of my college career installing fences every free moment I had. After graduation, my soon to be wife, that same roommate, Jeff Muszynski (class of '97) and I moved to Atlanta and started Siena Fence Company. We operated in Atlanta for several years until deciding to relocate back to our home in NY. Some time after moving back, I learned that Jeff had been killed in Atlanta. The following year I decided to re-open Siena Fence Co. in New York.

SY: Chris and I were neighbors growing up and have been like brothers since grade school. I was working as a surveyor when Chris was learning the ropes of the fence industry. We knew my background in surveying and his in marketing and management would be beneficial in starting a new business. Together, with Chris's wife, Andrea, we started Siena Fence Company. We ventured out with only \$1,600 to our name, a plan, and a lot of determination. Now, almost four years later, we have grown to a multi-million dollar a year company.

SM: Why was it important for you to start your own business?

SY: Chris and I had worked odd jobs together growing up, from mowing lawns, to painting houses, to baking. We always had fun while we worked. When I first started in this industry, I worked at a company that Chris was working for at

the time. Although I was learning a lot, it was anything but fun.

CL: Before starting our own business, we worked for a company where you had to walk on egg shells everyday. The work was not stressful or overwhelming, but the environment was just too much to take. The work was actually enjoyable, but the situation was torture. Although owning and operating a business tends to be much more work, we've found that it is much less stressful.

SM: Did you have a business plan?

CL: We worked very hard preparing an elaborate business plan with projections for the first several years. However, very shortly after starting, we came to the realization that we grossly underestimated our potential. Within the first four months we surpassed our first year's projected sales, and by the end of our first full year, we were beyond anything we had planned on. I don't think we could have predicted our growth, even now going into our fourth year, we still can't believe how fast we are continuing to grow.

SM: What makes you unique in this industry?

SY: A lot of companies say they are family owned and operated, but I think we exemplify the term. My father Bill is in charge of our yard, receiving, loading and unloading of all materials, and does a lot of the residential estimates. My brother Eli runs our wood shop and personally oversees every wood panel that goes out the door. My fiancée Kelly works full time in the office, setting up appointments and preparing the residential estimates for customers. Chris' brother Joe runs our

chain link shop, fabricating all of our gates and preparing the orders. His brothers Ryan and John work as installers, and Chris' wife Andrea is the majority owner, handling the essentials of the business, everything from health insurance and retirement programs, to payroll and public relations.

CL: Being surrounded by family certainly presents some challenges that you might not face in a typical working environment. However, having a workforce of family gives you a sense of trust and loyalty that you can not find anywhere else. Every single person in our company cares about the future of the business, and we care about our employees in a way that most companies don't. Their well being is more important than the bottom line.

SM: What is the mix of residential and commercial, and who handles each?

CL: We do about 40% residential and 60% commercial. Seth handles almost all of the residential estimates, which can be difficult to believe at times. Just as an example, Seth saw 34 customers at their homes in three days last week. Twelve on Thursday, twelve on Friday, and ten on Saturday -and all 34 were typed up and mailed out by the following Monday. Of course this pace slows a little after spring, but he certainly has his hands full right now. I handle the bidding on the commercial projects which range from cell phone tower enclosures and dumpster enclosures, to backstops and tennis courts, to large perimeter security fence projects.

SM: What types of fence do you sell?

SY: We sell galvanized and vinyl coated chain link, ornamental aluminum and

steel, all styles of vinyl fencing and cedar wood fencing.

SM: Which type is the most popular?

SY: Chain link is by far the most popular commercial fence. In the residential market, vinyl and aluminum are becoming increasingly more popular. Last year we began stocking ornamental aluminum fencing that meets NYS pool code. We do a lot of work for customers having in-ground pools installed, and the aluminum fence is a favorite for enclosing pools. More and more it seems people are drawn to anything maintenance free.

SM: What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

CL: I would say the most rewarding part is when we complete a large project and turn back to look at it and say "wow, we did that," knowing that it will most likely be there for generations. One particular project that comes to mind was a 36' tall backstop we did at Husky Field in Gloversville. The posts were 6" around and 45' long -they had to be stood up with a backhoe. It felt great to walk away from this massive backstop and know that kids will be playing there long after I'm gone.

SY: For me, it is at our company Christmas party each year. Being able to look around

at the amazing group of people we have surrounded ourselves with and realize how much it has grown from the year before. Our first party had six people and this past year we had 16 people. It's very rewarding to think about where we started and how far we've come in such a short time.

SM: How has attending Siena contributed to the success of your business?

CL: I actually started Siena as a Biology Major with plans of going to medical school. After one semester, I realized that was certainly not for me and I switched my major to marketing & management. I did not know it at the time, but the classes I was taking then would eventually help me tremendously. I remember spending an entire semester taking a class on writing a business plan. In hind sight, I wish I had paid a little closer attention, but overall the education I received at Siena has been extremely beneficial. My wife Andrea is also a Siena alumni and worked at Siena as an Admissions Counselor for a time, before having our first daughter. Our ties

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to the Siena community and our education have been huge assets in starting our business.

SM: How do you achieve a sense of balance in your life?

SY: I try to get away on the weekends. After a long week, I love to get out and go hunting or fishing. I know Chris does a lot of hiking in the Adirondacks. I think just being outdoors, away from day to day life gives us a chance to recharge for the upcoming week.

SM: What are your goals for Siena Fence?

SY: We want to maintain the level of quality, professionalism and honest, competitive pricing that has made us successful. We hope to continue to grow Siena Fence in such a way that when people think about fencing, Siena Fence immediately comes to mind.

We sell and professionally install chain link, wood, ornamental aluminum and PVC fencing, and offer a wide range of other products to the residential, commercial and industrial markets.



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