

BUSINESS: Stouffville company has made signs for large clients such as CIBC, NIKE, and Imperial Tobacco Co.

Life is good for entrepreneur

Armstrong Sign Group won the chamber of commerce's entrepreneur of year award for 1999

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Go-karts and race cars played a critical role in the launching of one of Stouffville's most successful businesses.

Today, Court Armstrong can be found behind the desk at Armstrong Sign Group in Gormley. A decade ago, he could be found behind the wheel of a go-kart or a race car.

Armstrong Sign Group, complete with 14 employees designs, manufactures and sells signage material, including banners.

The firm's clients include the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Nike and the Imperial Tobacco Co. As well, Armstrong just

partner, he consults with her on what makes a business tick. Boynton knows what makes her son tick.

About 10 years ago, Court Armstrong, complete with his passion for go-karts and race cars, found himself in Florida.

He raced, noticed the promotional side of things and after a while, found himself working in public relations for the Players GM series, sponsored by Molson's.

During this time, Armstrong's buddy Tom Clark of Family Cartway in Whitby was into the racing circuit in Florida.

Armstrong helped promote his racing friend, while the young Armstrong enjoyed the sun and the surf and, of course, living on his own away from home.



STAFF PHOTOS/SIGERD WITTEVEEN



signed a contract to supply promotional material for the Nations Cup, being held soon at Emerald Hills Golf Club in Stouffville.

As vice president of sales and marketing for the family-owned business, Armstrong, 33, handles mainly corporate accounts. Meanwhile, he's always on the hunt for new business.

I came home

Armstrong's father Ron Armstrong is company president, and his sister Kathryn Harrison is production and operations manager. The business includes other family members, as well.

"Yes, we're very much a family business," said Armstrong.

"We value long term relationships with the customers, suppliers and employees. We are known as a reliable trustworthy supplier. We know that quick turnaround is an essential part of our customers' expectation," stressed Armstrong.

While his mom Ruth Boynton, part president of the chamber of commerce, isn't a

While in Florida, Armstrong decided to open a signage business geared to the automotive industry. He rented a 10 by 10 foot mini 'u-store-it' shed, started to call himself a businessman and hoped he had hit on a sure thing. In the evenings, Armstrong focused on the signage business, while he ran a scooter and sea jet rental business during the day.

A while after opening the dual business, his father visited.

"He liked what he saw and suggested the signage part would make an excellent family business," said Armstrong.

"I came home. The Armstrongs opened in Whitby. "I was a very slow beginning," said Armstrong.

"We were completely green. But our name is on it. We make sure we handle quality. We don't want our name tarnished." After a couple of years, a move was in store. Needing larger quarters, the choice was Stouffville.

"We picked Gormley. It offers excellent accessibility to Toronto. It proved to be a wise move," said Armstrong. "We've got 10,000 square feet here. We need 16,000 square feet," said Armstrong.

For Armstrong Sign Group, 2000 promis-

Court Armstrong stands in the production area of his company Armstrong Signs, located in Gormley. Armstrong says he gauges risk with economic climate and chose Gormley to start his sign business because of its convenient location to highways. In photo left, Armstrong and Kathryn Harrison go over a sign in the production area of the company on Stouffville Road.

es to be a banner year. A while ago, Armstrong designed a frame, which is used in the display of banners. Called the BannerSling, the product has been a hit, said Armstrong.

"The BannerSling was my brainchild. It has been successful."

We picked Gormley. It offers excellent accessibility to Toronto. It proved to be a wise move.

"It's a light-weight, self-supporting portable banner frame. It's easy to carry and set up for sports events, conferences, training seminars or as a backdrop display at a

community sponsorship or it can go up indoors.

A birth of a new century will mean booms in the sign business. "Taking a risk right now is easy. We gauge risk with the economic climate. Yes, we're looking at 2000. It'll mean a lot of business. It'll mean many banners and much promotion," he said.

When Armstrong isn't pushing Armstrong Sign Group, he and his wife Suzan enjoy their new home in Stouffville. As well, the couple have just bought some property for a cottage.

Last week, Armstrong was the Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce choice for Business Entrepreneur of the Year.

"Life is good," said Armstrong.

Armstrong Signs - 1999 Entrepreneur of the Year