

The Wood Guy

Why Stan Krempges' Wood Re New was named a "get rich quick" business

BY GREGORY HOLMAN

It's an unpretentious office on Springfield's east side, almost completely free of decoration, except for a few framed motivational poster prints. It's the home of Woodbrite, a fast-growing local company founded by Mt. Vernon native Stan Krempges. Woodbrite specializes in a service called Wood Re New—cleaning up and protecting exterior wood fixtures. If the before-and-after pictures on Wood Re New's website are any guide, Wood Re New really works.

The foam cleanser can take a gray, weathered wooden deck and make it all but new. Then the company applies a preservative coating to keep the wood looking good. Krempges credits the heavy demand for this kind of service (projected sales for 2004 were \$1.3 million) to homeowners' renewed interest in spending money on their houses since September 11.

Public policy may also play a role in the company's growth: In March 2003, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned chromated copper arsenate, a chemical used in pressure-treated lumber that is a "known human carcinogen," according to the EPA. Rather than ripping out a deck or wood siding made with pressure-treated lumber for fear of getting cancer, the EPA has told consumers they might want to consider coating their exterior wood with an environmentally friendly protectant. That's where Krempges and Wood Re New come in; their product contains no acids or chlorine bleach.

For Krempges, trends and policy aren't what's made his company successful. "I remember my 15th birthday," he says. "I promised myself that when I'm 45, my goal is to be a respected businessman and [I'll] go to work because I want to, not because I have to." This has meant finding good employees (he calls them "fantastic") and carefully guarding the company's reputation. (Not everyone who wants to spend \$40,000 to \$50,000 on a Wood Re New franchise is allowed to join the system). "We wanted to take the slow road and have solid, strong growth," he says.

And their outlook is sunny: The company hopes to have sales of \$10 million by 2010 and was recently named a "Get Rich Quick" business by *Small Business Opportunities* magazine. "It's exciting," Krempges simply says. ¶

