



Downtown Business Producing for Host of National Brands

If you head west on 12th Street from Trade Street in downtown Winston-Salem, you immediately start to notice all of the purple warehouse doors on the right – this is the home of Phoenix Packaging. Started in 1983 by Tom Skinner, Phoenix is housed in the former Winston Leaf Tobacco warehouse and boasts an impressive view of the Winston-Salem skyline. What’s with the purple? “It was my daughter’s idea to go with purple. Our company color was red, but I liked the purple, so we changed it. I still like it,” Tom says with a shrug.

Skinner and his only child, daughter Erika von Isenburg, who serves as sales manager for Phoenix, are running a strong, successful company behind all of those purple doors. They seem to make quite a team. “She’s my buddy,” Tom says. “We’re on the same wavelength.”

Originally, Phoenix focused largely on making the corrugated boxes used to ship furniture. As the years have passed and so much of the furniture industry has gone overseas, Phoenix has adapted. The company is now known for its full-color graphic corrugated displays for nearly every product under the sun.

A walk through the sample room in the Phoenix office says it all. There’s NASCAR and there’s Nestle. Gillette to your left, Glad Ware to your right. “Believe it or not, the company we’ve run the longest for is Iams,” says Skinner, patting his hand on a dog food display in the middle of the room. “A good number of our national account customers are actually part of our large format trade business.”

Local favorites peek out of the bunch, too, like a Krispy Kreme Halloween display from a while back. “Over the years, we’ve seen it all,” Tom says. Displays that start their journey at Phoenix end up in grocery stores, drug stores, bulk membership stores, and nameless other retailers all over the country.

Phoenix employs a work force of around 20 people on regular basis, but Skinner says that during the “peak” season, the addition of temporary workers can take that number anywhere between 30 and 40. “In July we are already working on Christmas displays, and at Thanksgiving we are looking ahead to Valentine’s Day. It gets busy,” Tom says.

With Tom and Erika focusing on their sales and production work, accounting was something they didn’t want to have to have as a worry in the backs of their minds. “I had been through two or three accountants and never really got what I wanted,” says Tom. “I found Butler + Burke in the phone book, drove to their office, walked in the front door and said I was a small business owner and I needed an accountant.”

Jane Potter was the person available to meet with Tom that day, and they have been a match ever since. “They’re big enough that you know they know what they’re doing, but small enough that they still talk to you,” he says. “I can’t say enough good things about them.”

For more information on Phoenix Packaging, visit www.purplepackaging.com.