

Amberg sets sights on Sunshine State

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Amberg Entertainment is jumping into a new market in the Sunshine State.

The Springfield-based entertainment provider for corporate parties opened its sixth location Nov. 1 in Sarasota, Fla. Other markets with a presence include St. Louis, Dallas, Denver and Bentonville, Ark.; the two-year-old Dallas location is a partnership with Jumper Bee Entertainment Group, owner and founder Ted Amberg said.

Weather was a primary factor in the company's decision to add a Southeastern office.

"Our outside events drop substantially between November and into February," Amberg said.

To more evenly spread monthly revenues, the company is moving some inflatable equipment to Florida during the winter months, he said.

To lead the initiative, Amberg brought back his former regional director of operations, Jules Garcia, as head of the Sarasota office. Garcia was in Springfield until leaving for Florida six years ago, in pursuit of a climate change.

"Ted and I have always maintained a good relationship," Garcia said. "The opportunity presented itself. I talked to Ted about six months ago. We just kind of ran with it."

Garcia said Amberg visits family in Florida frequently, and both noticed that there were several mom-and-pop inflatable companies but none doing larger events.

"We've been talking for the last year or so about doing something," Amberg said. "Florida is one I've been eyeballing for the last few years. It's a lot more saturated market. I'm pumped and ready to play."

Amberg relocated the corporate

headquarters in December to 1311 E. Republic Road. The company, which has seven full-time and around 50 part-time employees, offers event planning and inflatable rentals, specializing in large corporate events as well as casino nights and birthday parties.

Each regional office serves a 100-mile radius, except Springfield, which Amberg said covers more ground.

Bouncing competition

Although other inflatable/entertainment businesses have popped up in the Springfield market – Jump Mania in June 2008; Jumpin' Joey's LLC in September 2009; and Ozarks Entertainment LLC in July – Amberg said his company's expansion is not a reaction to increased local competition.

Amberg Entertainment's main competition comes from national entertainment firms taking aim at his larger local clients such as James River Assembly, Tyson Foods and area universities.

Kert Parsley, chief operations officer with James River Assembly, said the church hires Amberg Entertainment for its I Love America event and other large outings.

"We know they have the capacity to deliver the number of games that we need as

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Springfield-based Amberg Entertainment added a sixth location in Sarasota, Fla. With the exception of Springfield, the locations serve about a 100-mile radius. Springfield's location has serviced events as far west as Salt Lake City and as far east as Pittston, Pa.

Amberg: Company develops software, Web site

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well as the staff," Parsley said.

Springfield-based Ozarks Entertainment this summer launched its entertainment business model. Specializing in Las Vegas-style gaming, limousine and valet services, food packages, tents and inflatables, the company has worked on 25 events and has 15 more in the works, said Robert DeVore, who owns the business with BJ Richardson and David Johnson.

"Our only real competition is Amberg," DeVore said.

Founded in 1996, Amberg Entertainment was the top company in the 25-100 employees category for Springfield Business Journal's 2010 Choice Employers awards and was the 2006 Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year. Amberg said there's more to the entertainment business than some might realize.

"It's easy to watch a company like us and go, 'Oh, we should be able to do that.' I think that's why you see so much turnover," Amberg said. "They realize the extreme labor that goes into it, they realize the logistics, the time, the marketing stuff, and they burn out in a couple years. There's a few companies who make it longer, but we've seen a lot of people come and go."

Amberg acquired one such company, Vertical Visions, in 2002 after it had been operating for about a year.

That isn't just local, but a nationwide industry trend, Amberg said, adding that the seasonality of the business can be a hindrance.

"In the early stages, you have to learn how to manage your money properly," Amberg said. "People get into it in the summer and think 'Oh, this is great,' and they die in the winter and don't know what to do for

income. That's one of the reasons we have expanded in what we do so much."

Revenue streams

Although bounce houses and inflatables are a large part of Amberg's business, a focus on other niche markets keeps the company busy during the off-season.

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—Ted Amberg
Amberg Entertainment Inc.

Amberg said, noting that he has taken on trade shows, lectures and book writing to generate additional income.

In a series of books – "The Inflatable Toolbox," "The Inflatable Bible," and "Inflate Your

Profits" – Amberg writes about the inflatable industry.

His company also has developed a software product targeting inflatable and rental business owners. Event Wizard Pro, he said, is for anybody in the rental business including wedding supplies, tools, linens and inflatables. In mid-December Amberg Entertainment plans to roll out www.inflatabletradingpost.com, a Web site for businesses like Amberg's to trade, buy and sell inflatable equipment. The software and Web site were both developed in house, Amberg said.

The Web site, books and software account for nearly 10 percent of the company's revenues, which Amberg declined to disclose for 2010. He said the figure is up about 25 percent compared to 2009.



Ted Amberg is an author of such books as "The Inflatable Bible."