

SPRINGFIELD Spirit

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Amberg Entertainment named Small Business of the Year

For a company based on fun, Amberg Entertainment's business history is anything but funny. "Impressive" might be a better word.

The 10-year-old event and entertainment company was named W. Curtis Strube Small Business of the Year at a May 3 award luncheon hosted by the Chamber.

Over the past decade, Amberg Entertainment has become one of the fastest growing entertainment companies in the United States, with two spin-off divisions, a franchise, three offices and two related start-up businesses. Ted Amberg founded the company when he was just a 19-year-old, performing magic at birthday parties.

Amberg was one of five finalists for the prestigious award, presented by the Chamber's Small Business Council. The other finalists are Family Pharmacy (Plainview Road location), 417 Magazine, PaperWise, Inc., and Springfield Office Supply, Inc.

An independent panel of judges based its selection on staying power, response to adversity, innovative products or services, business philosophy and contributions to the community.

The annual award is named for the late director of the Breech School of Business at Drury University, Dr. W. Curtis Strube. He was instrumental in the creation of many programs for small



Last year's Small Business of the Year recipient, Terry Hicklin, Candy House, with this year's recipient, Ted Amberg, Amberg Entertainment.

businesses, among them the Small Business Council of the Chamber.

The award celebrates the importance of small business. In the Springfield area, 97 percent of businesses have fewer than 100 employees.

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Amberg gambled with his life savings in 2002 to purchase inflatable games, rides and other equipment to complement his magic business. The move paid off and bookings for company picnics, trade shows and youth events quickly followed.

A year later, a separate division was created to provide graphic design for entertainment companies across the United States using software created by Amberg employees. A second division devoted to Las Vegas-style casino parties has seen 90 percent sales growth since its creation in 2004.

Amberg started a franchise in Denver last year and hopes to open more. The company has expanded to a third office in Bentonville, Ark., and purchased two related businesses: Show-Me Photography and Starlight Music. Its Party Place in Springfield has become a popular birthday party destination for children. Thousands of guests enjoy Amberg's activities each year at James River Assembly of God's Fourth of July celebration.