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Jump-starting the state's economy Association recognizes top 50 small businesses

Yvette Armendariz
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Mark Loberg's garage-based start-up isn't the only small business in the state growing like crazy, but his Premier Garage is a prime example.

He caught on to a trend in the home-remodeling market: Maximizing garage space. He combined two specialties, floor epoxy and cabinets, and aimed for the high-end niche market.

"We've exploded like an atom bomb," said Loberg, who started the business in *his* garage and as recently as 2 1/2 years ago employed 26.

Today, his operation in Phoenix has more than 60 workers; he also employs about 20 at his manufacturing and distribution plant located in Atlanta. Next month, Loberg plans to move the company into a new larger space in Phoenix.

Premier is one of "50 Arizona Companies to Watch" that the Arizona Small Business Association will recognize Thursday at the Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa.

Loberg grew the company by using a franchise model. He now has 76 franchise locations nationally.

Annual sales have grown 750 percent the past four years, he said. The company recently was ranked 179 for fast-growth private companies by *Inc.* magazine.

"It's kinda like riding a rocket ship with no handle," Loberg said, crediting his employees and his own active involvement in the company for his success.



"I'm here every single day of the week, putting in 12- to 14-hour days," he said. "That work ethic carries down the line to the people who work for us."

Together, the 50 honored businesses expect to create 500 full-time jobs in 2006, a 26 percent annual gain over their 2005 workforces, proving that small, fast-growing companies can be a powerhouse for employment.

Arizona jobs, from large and small employers, are expected to grow 5.5 percent this year, according to the state Department of Economic Security.

"Those are real jobs, not projections," said Tom Fraker, the executive director at the business association, about the plans of the 50 companies. "There wasn't one company that wasn't trying to hire one, five, 10 people."

The growth is something not always well-documented, as most business headlines deal with financial markets and publicly traded companies.

Fraker wanted to change that. He connected with the Edward Lowe Foundation, known for its work promoting entrepreneurship, to find these hidden gems among companies in Arizona.

Fraker's goal was to get their stories out, proving their value to the economy, and to create a venue for them to find support for their rapid growth.

In all, their workforces will hit about 2,400, with an annual payroll of \$100 million. Sales also are skyrocketing 57 percent, with expectations that they will generate \$725 million this year.

The small-business group and the Lowe foundation also will recognize five companies out of the 50 for excellence in cognitive company culture, community compassion, creative customer relations, cutting-edge change and competitive clout. The five areas distinguish these companies among their competitors and are the foundation of their success, Fraker said.

Peter Burns, who recently taught entrepreneurship at Arizona State University, said that these innovators are key to keeping the Arizona economy growing and that they must be recognized.

"You're looking at the future Fortune 100 companies, if they choose to take that route," he said. "None of them are born major; all of them start minor."

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The Arizona Small Business Association received more than 280 nominations in its attempt to recognize 50 companies statewide. Honorees are:

AGM Container Controls Inc., Tucson. Manufacturer of metal products founded in 1970; 83 full-time equivalent employees in 2005; Howard Stewart, president and chief executive officer.

<http://www.agmcontainer.com/>

AIR Marketing, Tempe. Advertising agency founded 1997; 30 FTEs in 2005; Elaine Ralls, president.

<http://www.airmarketing.com/>

AmazingMail.com Inc., Scottsdale. Direct-mail advertising founded 1998; 45 FTEs; Steve Wilen, CEO.

<http://www.amazingmail.com/>

American Janitorial Services LLC, Scottsdale. Janitorial services founded in 2002; 60 FTEs; Ron Busby, president.

AmpliMed Corp., Tucson. Pharmaceutical researcher/ manufacturer founded in 1989; 15 FTEs; Robert Ashley, chairman, president and CEO.

<http://www.amplimed.com/>

Apothecary Shops, Scottsdale. Specialty pharmacy founded in 1996; 94 FTEs; John Musil, president and CEO.

<http://www.theapothecaryshop.com/>

Arizona Capacitors LLC, Tucson. Manufacturer of electronic devices founded in 2002; 24 FTEs; Anne Waisman, president.

<http://www.arizonacapacitors.com/>

AZ Tech Radiology and Scan4Health, Casa Grande. Medical imaging company founded in 1998; 70 FTEs; Rocky Pahwa, chairman and CEO.

<http://www.aztechradiology.com/>

Baja Motorsports, Tempe. Motor vehicle design and sales company founded in 2004; 85 FTEs; Richard Godfrey, president and CEO.

<http://www.bajamotorsports.net/>

Benjamin Franklin Plumbing, Gilbert. Residential plumbing contractor founded in 1985; 7 FTEs; Linda Stanfield, owner.

[http://www.benfranklinplumbing/](http://www.benfranklinplumbing.com/southeastvalley-az) .com/southeastvalley-az

Best Block & Pipe Inc., Yuma. Cement manufacturer founded in 1972; 45 FTEs; Phil Williams, owner.

BestBill, Phoenix. Billing-support service founded in 1997; 18 FTEs; Daniel Haugland, CEO.

<http://www.bestbill.com/>

Charlevoix Homes, Scottsdale. Home builder founded in 2002; 32 FTEs; Michael Roberts, CEO.

<http://www.cvxhomes.com/>

Construction Lots! Home Improvement Warehouse, Phoenix. Dealer in building materials founded in 2004; 41 FTEs; Rick Werner, CEO.

<http://www.constructionlots.com/>

Creative Interiors, Prescott. Interior design service founded in 1996; 16 FTEs; Tanya Padgett, president.

DBSI Inc., Chandler. Installer of banking equipment and commercial contractor founded in 1998; 34 FTEs; Debra Dillon, president.

<http://www.dbsi-inc.com/>

Desert Best Distributing LLC, Yuma. Wholesaler of janitorial products and bar supplies founded in 2003; 15 FTEs; Frank Ruiz, owner.

Desert Fleet-Serv Inc., Phoenix. Diesel truck maintenance founded in 1995; 25 FTEs; Tom Cooper, CEO.

<http://www.desertfleet-serv.com/>

DollarDays International LLC, Scottsdale. Online wholesaler founded in 2001; 43 FTEs; Marc Joseph, co-founder and CEO.

<http://www.dollardays.com/>

Dorn Homes Inc., Green Valley. Home builder founded 1971; 40 FTEs; David Grounds, president and CEO.

<http://www.dornhomes.com/>

GAME-Great American Merchandise and Events, Scottsdale. Marketing consultant founded in 1988; 28 FTEs; Eric Schechter, president.

<http://www.game-group.com/>

Granite Shop of Northern Arizona Inc., Prescott. Countertop manufacturer/installer founded in 2004; 15 FTEs; Dee Spitler, president.

Great American Title Agency Inc., Phoenix. Escrow and title service founded in 1998; 51 FTEs; Mark Bosco, chairman.

<http://www.azgat.com/>

Hoque & Associates Inc., Phoenix. Engineering service founded in 1997; 19 FTEs; Enamul Hoque, president.

<http://www.hoqueandassociates.com/>

I-ology, Scottsdale. Internet marketing firm founded in 1998; 15 FTEs; Trish Bear, president, founder and CEO.

<http://www.i-ology.com/>

Integrated Health Management Services, Phoenix. Health care billing and eligibility service assistance founded in 1996; 78 FTEs; Betsy Moore, principal.

<http://www.ihmsllc.com/>

Interior Expressions Design Showroom, Oro Valley. Interior design service founded in 2000; 10 FTEs; Betty Jones, co-owner.

<http://www.interiorexpressionsaz.com/>

J2 Engineering & Environmental Design LLC, Phoenix. Engineering service founded in 2002; 21 FTEs; Jeffrey Holzmeister, president.

<http://www.j2design.us/>

JLT Mobile Computers Inc., Tempe. Computer equipment wholesaler founded in 1999; 22 FTEs; Todd Einck, founder and CEO.

<http://www.jltmobilecomputers.com/>

Ken Kobs & Associates Inc., Phoenix. Medical device distributor founded in 1998; 27 FTEs; Ken Kobs, president.

<http://www.orthopartz.com/>

Liquid Productions Inc., Mesa. Marketing consultant founded in 2001; 18 FTEs; Scott Miraglia, president.

<http://www.liquidproductions.com/>

Machine Solutions Inc., Flagstaff. Custom manufacturer founded 2000; 62 FTEs; Daniel Kasprzyk, president and CEO.

<http://www.machinesolutions.com/>

Massage Envy Limited LLC, Scottsdale. Massage therapy franchise founded in 2002; 33 FTEs; John Leonesio, founder and CEO.

<http://www.massageenvy.com/>

McIntosh Engineering Inc., Tempe. Engineering/construction service founded in 1986; 56 FTEs; Scott McIntosh, CEO.

<http://www.mcintoshengineering.com/>

Mi Ranchito Mexican Food Products Inc., Phoenix. Tortilla-chip manufacturer/catering service founded in 1977; 49 FTEs; Robert Murillo, president and CEO.

<http://www.mi-ranchito.com/>

MistAMERICA Corp., Scottsdale. Mist/fog system manufacturer/installer founded in 1994; 32 FTEs; Jonathan Marsh, CEO.

<http://www.mistamerica.com/>

Native Tele-Data Solutions, Tucson. Telecommunication contractor founded in 1996; 28 FTEs; Marilyn Steeber, president.

<http://www.ntds.org/>

Premier Garage, Phoenix. Cabinet manufacturer founded in 1999; 71 FTEs; Mark Loberg, founder and CEO.

<http://www.premiergarage.com/>

Prescott Aerospace Inc., Prescott Valley. Aerospace machine shop founded in 1983; 37 FTEs; Michael K. Dailey, president/general manager.

<http://www.prescottaerospace.com/>

Protein Technologies Inc., Tucson. Bio-organic synthesizer manufacturer founded in 1985; 30 FTEs; Chris Patterson, president and CEO.

<http://www.pti-instruments.com/>

Real Learning Co., Scottsdale. Leadership trainer founded in 1993; 42 FTEs; Richard Hodge, president.

<http://www.reallearning.com/>

SEBRA, Tucson. Manufacturer of medical equipment founded in 1974; 82 FTEs; Roger Vogel, CEO.

<http://www.sebra.com/>

Shephard-Wesnitzer Inc., Sedona. Engineering service founded in 1990; 60 FTEs; John Wesnitzer, president and CEO.

<http://www.swiaz.com/>

Sitewire, Tempe. Marketing consultant founded in 1999; 29 FTEs; Margie Traylor, CEO.

<http://www.sitewire.net/>

SynCardia Systems Inc., Tucson. Manufacturer of cardiac equipment founded in 2001; 24 FTEs; Rodger Ford, president and CEO.

<http://www.syncardia.com/>

Tucson Embedded Systems Inc., Tucson. Computer software-integration service founded in 1997; 70 FTEs; Dennis Kenman, vice president and co-owner.

<http://www.tucsonembedded.com/>

Urban Forest Tree Care Inc., Phoenix. Landscape service founded in 2000; 41 FTEs; Malia Griffin, CEO.

<http://www.urbanforettreecare.com/>

ViewFinder Low Vision Resource Center, Sun City. Optometry practice founded in 1992; 11 FTEs; Lynne Noon, owner and founder.

<http://www.viewfinderlowvision.com/>

Villagio Tile & Stone, Scottsdale. Tile/stone retailer founded in 2002; 21 FTEs; Douglas Adamson, president.

<http://www.vtile.com/>

VirtuRad Inc., Phoenix. Electronic imaging service founded in 2000; 11 FTEs; Hirsch Handmaker, chairman and CEO.

<http://www.virturad.com/>

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