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Small Business Spotlight

Lighting company Illuminating Concepts thinks bigger

By KAREN DYBIS
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Imagine walking through Dearborn's Greenfield Village and seeing a garish, oversized loudspeaker hanging from one of the quaint light fixtures.

Such a modern intrusion would likely ruin the trip back in time for many visitors.

The challenge for Farmington Hills-based Illuminating Concepts—among the contractors helping with the village renovation several years ago—was to avoid that scenario.

Part lighting experts and part magicians, the company came up with a small speaker that fitted nicely into the base of said light fixture. No one could see it, but everyone could hear the sound it produced.

The patent on these clever concealed placement speakers is one of about 25 such patents Illuminating Concepts holds.

"It's about understanding your value in the industry and adding value beyond your client's wildest expectations to their development," said Ron Harwood, company founder and owner.

Harwood started Illuminating Concepts (IC) in 1965 as an electrical contracting



Illuminating Concepts' Ron Harwood has helped create an international lighting and "immersion experience" development company.

How they did it

Strategy: To develop clients, Illuminating Concepts brought in a staff of engineers and designers who have come up with patent-worthy inventions for projects locally, nationally and internationally.

Specialty: Lighting and multimedia company

Where: 30733 W. 10 Mile, Farmington Hills
Information: (248) 478-2525 or
www.illuminatingconcepts.com

business, becoming a lighting design firm in 1981. Since its founding, IC has virtually exploded into an internationally recognized lighting and "immersion experience" development company.

That commitment to its clients' visions—and the creative drive of Harwood and his staff—is what has allowed IC to grow physically and financially over the past few years.

Nearly three years ago, IC added a sleek hangar-like warehouse studio space to its headquarters, giving the company about 25,000 square feet of space to develop its signature atmospheric lighting and architectural details.

In the last year, IC has seen revenues rise from \$8.5 million to \$20 million, the result of

a shift in the company's approach to pursuing and securing some of the world's most high-profile lighting contracts.

"If it doesn't exist in the company and a client needs it, we'll incorporate it. We'll integrate it. We'll master it," explained Nick Priest, director of business and marketing development.

The staff of 45 people includes experts in architectural lighting design, theatrical lighting, fiber-optic networks, 3D animation, special effects and more.

Its most recent and notable project is in Las Vegas. IC is serving as the executive lighting consultant for the \$9 billion MGM City Center project. Having a single lighting company serve as the sole executive lighting consultant is an industry first, with IC supervising more than a dozen other lighting companies on the project.

Locally, IC designed, programmed and synchronized lighting and other multimedia features, such as the home run water fountain at Comerica Park, Detroit's downtown lighting streetscape, Fox Theatre, MGM Grand and the North Terminal at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. ■