

Special Award – *I Am Not Afraid* Empire Screen Printing

When one of this company's employees asked its president why he invited competitors to attend their national sales meeting and learn their secrets, he said, "They have screening presses, laminators and die presses, too, so the only difference is our people. I'm not afraid." Those words, spoken by John Freismuth, president of **Empire Screen Printing**, illustrate not only the company's confidence in its employees, but its belief that what benefits one benefits all. That belief has served Empire well since its founding by James Brush nearly 60 years ago.

Beginning in an old garage with a few orders a week, James Brush held down two full-time jobs while pouring every spare nickel into his fledgling printing business. As his business grew, he moved to larger quarters and began hiring employees. Today, the company is a nationally recognized and award winning innovator, with nearly 300 employees and customers across North America. Empire has expanded 19 times and now inhabits a 150,000-square-foot production facility. But despite its size, employees continue to be the company's most highly valued asset. A quarter of Empire's employees have been with the company for 20 to 45 years and employee ages range across four generations.

James Brush is now semi-retired and has turned over the company's leadership to stepson John Freismuth. John carries on the tradition of a family business that is printing with a purpose.

In 2011, Empire developed and became the first company in the world to successfully implement UV-LED ink curing technology. This new method allowed them to abandon graphic art film and the harsh development chemicals that are harmful to the environment. But Empire didn't stop there: they openly shared the game-changing UV-LED technology with their peers in the industry, and won national recognition in the process.

Now the company has gone a step further, recently completing development of a 12-color UV LED screen press that expands capacity by 25 percent. According to John, the company is always looking for ways to enhance green initiatives beyond regulatory compliance, and pioneer sustainable print methods that reduce energy and pollution.

Empire gives back to the communities in which its employees live, contributing to local charities, like the Special Olympics, and forging mentoring partnerships with high schools, UW La Crosse, and Western Technical College.

The judges were awed by the company's relentless pursuit of environmental sustainability and its generosity in sharing with other printers the methods it has developed to reach those goals.

This Special Award titled "I Am Not Afraid", goes to Empire Screen Printing, Inc., of Onalaska, Wisconsin.

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