

MEMPHIS BUSINESS JOURNAL

CAREER & WORKPLACE

SBA 2024 finalist: The one guiding principal Southern Spray has followed since 1972

GREG AKERS

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This year marked the 44th edition of the Small Business Awards, by far MBJ's longest-running event.

The Gold Sponsors of the 2024 Small Business Awards are ATA and Bank3. The Emerging Entrepreneurs Sponsor is the University of Memphis Fogelman College of Business & Economics. The Cocktail Sponsor is VC3.

A hallmark of the companies featured in the program year in and year out is that they seem to overlay time-tested practices with an opportunistic and innovative mindset. That mix is on full display in the profile below, and it was in the air at this year's ceremony, which was held June 6 at The Kent in Uptown.

On the surface, there might appear to be a tension or contradiction between those two poles. Following a well-worn groove with an expectation of reliably arriving at a desired outcome seems very sensible. But the idea of transgressing the traditional path to cut new lanes in the industry is equally enticing. Small Business Awards finalists and winners prove that finding a balance isn't just possible, it's definitional to success.

Entrepreneurial outfits know that to survive in a highly competitive world, one must recognize what's working and pool resources around it – while also continuously interrogating those assumptions and being ever-ready to go in a novel direction as inspiration strikes, technology emerges, or market conditions shift.

It's a high-wire act with no safety net – making

their achievements all the more impressive. – Greg Akers

Finalist, Small category

Southern Spray Co.

President

Kurt Throckmorton

Year founded

1972

Number of employees

19

What does the company do?

Professional chemical weed control for residential, industrial, and commercial clients; bush-hog mowing; and Christmas Decor lighting.

Why was the company started?

DuPont transferred chemical agricultural salesman, Keith Throckmorton, from Nebraska to Memphis in 1970. His main customers were farmers in Eastern Arkansas. He saw a need for chemical brush control applicators for their ditches. So, he began to moonlight on his time off to spray the chemicals for the farmers. In 1972, he left DuPont and founded Southern Spray Co. It expanded with a residential lawn care division and serves industrial and commercial clients. It's now run by Keith's son, Kurt Throckmorton, and this summer is the 52nd year that the company sprays the brush in those original Arkansas ditches.

To what do you attribute your company's success?



Keith Throckmorton founded Southern Spray Co. in 1972. His first customers were farmers in Eastern Arkansas.

“The Spray Way” – a culture that was created long ago by our founding workers. It means to do whatever [is necessary] and however long it takes to do a job the right way. The Spray Way is also reflected in our company's mission statement: We are a family business whose stature is driven by our dedication to maintaining an enjoyable workplace for our co-workers, by treating our valued customers with honesty and integrity, and by giving back to our community in appreciation for what we have been given.

What is the best business advice you have received?

Keith Throckmorton told Kurt, “Don't bust your ass on 95% of a job, then get tired and lazy, and neglect the last 5%. That is always what the customer will notice first.”