

Lenexa sauna business is 'hot,' says magazine

By JOYCE SMITH
The Kansas City Star

Jason Lincoln Jeffers suffered from chronic fatigue syndrome for a decade before finding a cure through the far-infrared therapy provided by saunas.

He was so impressed with the benefits of saunas he went into the business with his own brand, Sunlight Saunas. His company has been so successful it is now being recognized by *Entrepreneur* magazine as one of its "Hot 100" fastest-growing new entrepreneurial companies.

To be considered for the list, which appears in the June issue, a business must have been less than 5 years old, the founder must be actively involved in the business and have a controlling interest, and 2003 sales had to have exceeded \$1 million. Dun & Bradstreet then crunched the numbers to select the top 100.

Jeffers, who also suffered from mercury toxicity, said he tried several detoxification sources but didn't get results until he bought a sauna.

"Numerous studies have shown far-infrared is not only for detoxification but beyond that increases circulation for people who have arthritis, for chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, sore joints, to improve cardiovascular health and lower blood pressure," Jeffers said. "It's not just for treatment but to help cure the underlying conditions because it goes to the source."

Jeffers became a distributor for another sauna company before incorporating in mid-2001 as Sunlight Saunas to create his own brand. When he needed capital and more management experience to expand the business, he took on two partners – his sister Connie J. Zack and her husband, Aaron M. Zack. Connie Zack worked in sales at Procter & Gamble in Cincinnati and Aaron Zack was in marketing. The three initially invested \$200,000 from bank loans, credit cards and their savings and personal funds.

Jeffers and his sister grew up in St. Louis and Aaron Zack grew up in Kansas City. They recently decided to move the headquarters from Cincinnati to Lenexa for the quality of life in the area and the central location, both for shipping and customer service. Because most customers are on the coasts they can work an 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. schedule and catch clients in both directions.

Its showroom at 14119 Marshall Drive in the Lenexa headquarters is open to resi-



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So impressed was Jason Lincoln Jeffers (left) with saunas that he founded a Lenexa-based sauna firm—one of the 100 fastest-growing companies, says *Entrepreneur* magazine. Sister Connie Zack and her husband, Aaron Zack, of Overland Park, joined the business.

dential customers, builders and health-care providers, along with fitness centers and spa owners.

Jeffers said his saunas differ from other companies' in that he uses hypoallergenic materials such as basswood, real glass and solid framing, where some companies use plywood and Plexiglas. Sunlight Spas also has patented its heater technologies, which are designed to provide a broader distribution of heat.

The company has doubled its sales annually to \$3 million in 2003 and will have sales of more than \$6 million for its fiscal year ending June 30. It also will double its sales staff to eight in the next month.

Jeffers told *Entrepreneur* his success secret: You have to give in order to receive. But the partners also attribute their success to their employees.

"They know the saunas have helped me and they are passionate for our products," Jeffers said.

Along with the portable wooden units that can seat up to five persons and sell for \$3,395 to \$5,395, the company also has the Solo, a one-person unit that sells for \$1,695.

It also will soon introduce the Solopad, a far-infrared heated, full-size pad that is designed for pain relief and offers most of the same benefits as the sauna. It will retail for \$795.

Sunlight Saunas now sells about 200 units a month, with about 99 percent of orders done online. It hopes to expand its market through trade shows and by focusing on fitness centers and day spas.

Its nearest competitor sells 350 to 400 saunas a month through trade shows with little Internet sales. So Sunlight Saunas could conceivably triple its sales by doing trade shows.

Sunlight Saunas in commercial facilities such as day spas also will serve as advertising tools since potential customers will be able to try out the units. About 75 percent to 80 percent of its customers now buy the units without seeing them in person.

In late July, the company will launch www.sunlightspa.com to sell bath and beauty products, aromatherapy products, and the Solopad.

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