

## **CITY MAGAZINE**

### **Y.E.S.S. Award**

**Issue: June 2009**

*City Magazine* and Dickinson State University's Strom Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation's Young Entrepreneur Success Story (Y.E.S.S.) Award.

A recognition of entrepreneurs under 30 who are cultivating the spirit of innovation in N. Dak.

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#### **About the Y.E.S.S. Awards**

City Magazine and Dickinson State University's Strom Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation's Young Entrepreneur Success Story (Y.E.S.S.) Award winner will be announced each issue.

We will profile individuals who personify the entrepreneurial spirit of our state and offer some advice to others facing similar challenges as our featured entrepreneur.

Experts tell us there is a strong correlation between innovation, entrepreneurial activity and a region's economic vitality.

Creative young adults are key to N. Dak.'s economic future. If you know of an entrepreneur under 30 who is making a difference, we invite your nominations. Email us at *City Magazine*, [thecitymagazine@unitedprinting.com](mailto:thecitymagazine@unitedprinting.com), or call us at 701-223-0505.

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**Nic Cruz: CiNcity Designs**

**Mandan, North Dakota**

**[www.cincitydesigns.com](http://www.cincitydesigns.com)**

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## **“Entrepreneuring at the Speed of Light”**

With a name like Cruz, it seemed pretty likely that this 29-year-old entrepreneur would be a fast mover, but even Nic Cruz could never have predicted that, in his words, “A little business started at my kitchen counter for spare change would grow into a \$250,000 company in only a little over a year.”

Cruz and his three employees, all under the age of 25, customize headlights and taillights for clients around the world.

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### **Tell us why you began your company.**

It’s a simple answer—to make extra money on the side. I literally began the company with zero money. For years, I had been customizing headlights and taillights for my friends for free.

In February 2008, my first paying customer, a guy from Florida, called me with a job. He had seen one of my projects on the Internet. He sent me the parts, and I was on my way. I was able to quit my full-time job as an aviation technician in June that year.

### **Tell us about your company works.**

People from all over the world see our designs on our website or on YouTube. They ship the parts they want modified to us, along with their design; we complete the job and send it back to them. Every bit of the company is Internet based. Our local business is a drop in the bucket compared to what we do online.

### **What is it about your business that you are most proud of?**

In less than a year, I went from building lights in my kitchen to having five employees, and a big shop, and shipping our product to over twenty different countries. We get invited to car shows all over the country, and it’s cool to see our cars in those big shows.

**Did you have any early doubts that might have stopped you?**

At the time I quit my full-time job, I was nervous, but I knew it was the right thing to do. From February to June, when I quit, I had earned nearly \$50,000.

**Tell us about yourself.**

I am from Oregon originally and enlisted in the Air Force in 2001. I was assigned to Minot, and I never left. My first hire was a friend who was also in the military. It is easy to find employees who want to work here—it's cars, cars, cars all day long.

**Is there an interesting success story that you can share?**

Not in relation to any projects that we've done, but it's been interesting to see how fast everything has happened after being hooked up with the I.D.E.A. Center in Bismarck.

The I.D.E.A. Center is a nonprofit organization with a mission to help entrepreneurs realize their dreams. They are the ones who helped us from the beginning. They got me in touch with bankers, lawyers and accountants, and they are still helping us. The coolest part is that there are so many people who have helped us along the way for no charge.

**What do you think is the key to your success?**

Creativity is probably the biggest thing. No one else does what we are doing, and it really blows people away.

**What is your advice for other young entrepreneurs?**

It's always easier if it's something you love to do.

**If you could go back in time and do something differently, what would it be?**

I would have started charging a lot sooner. I began modifying lights in 2004, but I didn't know that I could have been making money—I didn't charge a dime for four years!

**What is your favorite part of the day?**

I like mornings. I always get to work early. I set my own hours, and it's nice to wake up and think, "I don't have to get up if I don't want to", though I always do!

### **Where do you see your company in the future?**

Right now we are doing a lot of one-of-a-kind customization. We would like to hire more people and get into mass production. We are looking for people who love cars and have creative minds.

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### **Our Advice:**

We contacted Ryan Tacke, a director at the I.D.E.A. Center in Bismarck. Tacke has been working with CiNcity Designs, and we asked him to explain how he helps young companies like Cruz's:

We are in the process of showing Cruz how to prepare a strategic plan. A company like CiNcity, that has an aggressive growth strategy, should put its plan together in phases.

My background is in operational management, and that is what CiNcity Designs needs right now. The company needs to focus on inventory management, efficiency and a next-step hiring plan. They are also looking for investors so we are showing them the things that need to be in place in order to make that happen. In short, we are trying to add a framework to the business that already exists.

At the I.D.E.A. Center, it's about partnerships with our entrepreneurs, college students and our "Wisdom Team." The Wisdom Team includes experts such as a patent attorney, accountants and bankers. For example, working with Cruz is a former bank president who volunteers his time to the project.

The I.D.E.A. Center is currently working with over 70 businesses and can be contacted at 701-250-2198.