

# Keys to Success

By Sherri Coner



A strong entrepreneurial spirit that began with a childhood lemonade stand and an equally strong commitment to customer service might just be the keys to Theo Etzel's success with Conditioned Air in Naples.

Hailing from the Miami area, Theo started as a sports announcer for football and water polo. He developed a love for a microphone and voiceover work while interning at WKAT radio on Miami Beach, then studied economics and finance at Stetson University while continuing to dabble in radio.

"That experience with broadcasting has served me well with marketing the business," Theo says.

Fresh out of college, he married Kim, his high school sweetheart, then accepted a position with Days Inns of America in real estate acquisition for the state of Florida. After quickly advancing in the company, Theo moved his family to Atlanta and served as vice president of development.

"Sometimes, it's not so much about what we do but how we do things," he says.

While living and working in Atlanta, that entrepreneurial spirit showed up again when Theo bought two Ben & Jerry's ice cream franchises. He also made time to serve as a staff member for Habitat for Humanity, building homes and acquiring and rezoning land in north Fulton County for the organization.

In 1995, Theo and his family headed further south, where he assumed the position of president and CEO of Conditioned Air Corporation of Naples Inc. At the time, it was a \$2.7 million operation in the residential market with 27 employees.

"I didn't know anything about air conditioning," Theo says, "but I

do know how people want to be treated."

These days, Conditioned Air is a \$40 million company with branch offices in Fort Myers and Sarasota and more than 300 employees.

But through the years, Theo has remained loyal to treating others how they

deserve to be treated, which includes community service.

In 2011, Conditioned Air was awarded the Uncommon Friends Foundation Business Ethics Award for its commitment to Integrity in its business practices.

In the midst of it all, Theo views himself as the designated coach.

"I hire people smarter than me, and we work hard for the customers we serve. Actually, our customers are our real employers."

With a grown son and daughter, and a granddaughter too, life stays busy for Theo and Kim. In their spare time, they enjoy participating in food and wine tours and cooking classes in Europe.

But this very friendly guy with the deep, warm voice also enjoys an occasional game of golf and loves music.

"I play the stereo; that's the only musical instrument I play," Theo says with a laugh.

Regardless of the tough economic climate in the last few years, Theo and his team continue to look forward with only positive attitudes.

"We are successful because of the people we have on board," he says. "They truly believe in our approach to customer service. Very few people do things the way we do."



"Sometimes, it's  
not so much about  
what we do but  
how we do things."