



TRIAD
COMMERCIAL
PROPERTIES

R E L A T E D N E W S A R T I C L E

CARDBOARD FIRM GETTING BIGGER HOME TO EXPAND

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Lloyd Whittington, The Business Journal

GREENSBORO -- The cardboard business that Rocky Manning started out of the back of his van less than five years ago will soon have a much more stationary home.

Rocky and his wife, Celeste, the owners of Universal Packaging Corp., plan to relocate by Oct. 15 to the former Southeastern Paper building at 3500 Lake Herman Drive. The couple, acting as Weston Lane Enterprises LLC, acquired the building and 6.3 acres of land recently from brothers Terry and Lewis Miller for about \$1.25 million, according to tax records.

The 58,800-square-foot building, expandable by 45,000 square feet, should hold their manufacturing and warehousing operation for a while -- maybe.

"We hope so, at least for a couple of years," said Celeste Manning, president of the company. "We're trying to hold the reins on it. We don't want to grow too fast."

Only five years ago, Rocky Manning was selling cardboard for Stone Container of Martinsville, Va., when he decided to start his own business, Universal Packaging. While he hoped 30 percent of his customers would follow him, 95 percent actually did.

Pretty soon, his volume demanded the full time efforts of his wife, who gave up teaching biology and anatomy to manage the company.

"I was scared to death," Celeste says of starting out. "I was a teacher at the time. But we've increased sales by \$1 million every year, and we don't have any business loans. We've done it all through our own revenues. The good Lord just keeps blessing us."

Today, the company has between \$5 million and \$6 million in annual revenues and employs about 20 people. While it started out small, the company has made a concerted effort to offer benefits such as health insurance and a 3 percent match for an Individual Retirement Account program.

"We've tried to take care of them," she said. "Without your employees, you're nothing."

The Mannings have grown from the van, to their home, to a warehouse in Kernersville and finally ended up three years ago at 6210 Swiggett Road. There, they leased space in the former Potpourri Press building that the state had acquired because it was in the planned Painter Boulevard corridor.

"The state had told us we had somewhere between two and 20 years," Celeste Manning said. "But funding came through a lot quicker than they had anticipated."

The Mannings, together with broker Tom Townes of Triad Commercial Properties, considered a dozen buildings and visited six across the Triad before settling on the Southeastern Paper building.

Constructed in 1989 and brokered by Will Blackwell of Samet Properties, the building was vacated more than a year ago by Southeastern Paper, which had outgrown it and moved across the Lake Herman Drive.

Their decision, Townes said, was driven primarily by the size, growth potential, proximity to workers and the ability to own the building. It didn't hurt, however, that the site is near the 1,700-acre Reedy Fork tract that Starmount Co. and Hubbard Realty are developing into a mixed-use project.

"We do feel that will be a plus, but we felt this area was good to be in anyway," Celeste Manning said.

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